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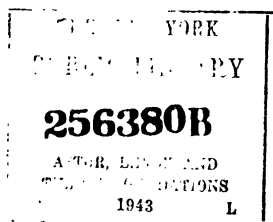
"I CAN'T WRITE THAT," RUTH DECLARED

THE NATURAL LAW

BY
CHARLES COLLINS

BASED ON THE DRAMA OF
HOWARD HALL AND CHARLES SUMMER

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THE NATURAL LAW

CHAPTER I

HER FIRST PROPOSAL

WHEN Doctor Ralph Webster asked Ruth Stanley to marry him, and she wonderingly and timidly said yes, she was only nineteen years old, and had not even begun to dream about a husband.

She was not the average kind of city-bred girl; New York was her birthplace and her home, but she was not precocious in the Manhattan way. She had not frolicked to rag-time rhythms with the young males of her class, and she had no retinue of cubbish gallants eager to take her to dancing parties and theaters, like the typical non-rural American maiden, who at the age of fourteen or thereabouts begins to assert with a boldness that astonishes

her parents her right to life, liberty and the pursuit of flirtations. Ruth was quiet and studious, a stay-at-home girl, a little old-fashioned, perhaps, in her modesty and shyness.

She was pretty enough to have had beaux by the dozen, and more than merely pretty too. There was a suggestion of poetic imagination in her broad, low forehead across which the silky brown hair would stray in vagrant wisps as if blown about by a breeze from open fields; there was a fine, steady glow of candor in her blue-gray eyes, and there was in the contour of her firm chin a hint of determination, of possible stubbornness of purpose. Ruth Stanley conveyed an impression of something more than virginal charm. Her face challenged the attention by its revelation of adolescent character. It was character, however, curiously mixed of two conflicting strains. Above her mouth her face was dreamy, sensitive, romantic, but the full lips and well-molded jaw indicated a capacity for meeting life on its own terms. Ruth had, or would have,

the undefinable quality called "personality"—that much could be said of her at first glance.

For the rest, she was a simple, well-bred American girl, at not the most interesting, perhaps, but certainly the most delectable age. She was slender, tall enough never to be patronized by pet names, and sufficiently robust to give a good account of herself at basket-ball or tennis, though she was not of athletic inclination. She was a girl to be looked at a second time, even in a parade of Fifth Avenue *ingénues*, but she dressed too demurely to invite that kind of scrutiny.

When Doctor Webster said abruptly and with an unsteady catch in his voice that was not at all like him, "Ruth, I want you to be my wife," it was the first time she had ever heard that momentous remark, in any kind of phrasing. She hadn't dreamed of hearing it for years, and Doctor Webster, although the man she knew best, was the last one she would have suspected of such intentions in her direction.

It was her first proposal; it was sudden, unex-

pected, almost ridiculously surprising. Her emotional response to this thunderbolt of romance, which came flashing down into her quiet life, may be described in only one way:—she was staggered. She stared at him in a wild-eyed, helpless kind of way, and could not trust herself to answer.

Behind Doctor Webster's blunt declaration, there was most of Ruth Stanley's life-history. He had always been her father's friend; she could remember him from the time she was eight years old. She had regarded him as of her father's age, for the two men would meet on a plane of intellectual equality, and held joint debates on all manner of imposing topics while she sat in a corner as quiet as a mouse, and marvelled at their vast fund of miscellaneous information.

Ralph Webster had always been, in fact, older than his years. He was ten years younger than Ruth's father when, as a budding physician, he had first appeared in the Stanley household; but the Van Dyke beard which he was then cultivating for

professional purposes had made him seem more impressively grown-up, to Ruth's childish eyes, than her own father, whose career as attorney-at-law did not demand such ornamentation.

This friendship between the two men had deepened with the years into an almost fraternal relationship. Doctor Webster's visits to the Stanley home did not dwindle away when his medical practice began to flourish, and Ruth, who had always listened to the men's talk until she was sent to bed, decided that since she possessed no legitimate claimant to that title, she would call him "Uncle Ralph." She was fourteen when she bestowed the avuncular relationship upon him, and her father had laughed at it, she remembered well enough, but Doctor Webster had looked embarrassed and made no cheery domestic answer. He didn't like it, she concluded, and so she soon withdrew the honor.

The Stanleys were comfortably established in a roomy brown-stone front near Morningside Park. It was an old-fashioned home, not strictly a part of the twentieth century, apartment-house life of Manhat-

tan; and it was, moreover, as good an example of an upper middle-class family homestead as could be found anywhere in the city, for most of the other brown-stone fronts of its period have declined to the humbler state of boarding-houses. To Mr. Stanley it represented the great prize of a career distinguished enough, but none too successful financially, as the rewards of legal practice go in New York City, and he was proud of it.

Ruth had not been educated in the regulation boarding-school and college way. The romance of feminized academic life at Radcliffe, Smith, Vassar or Wellesley, as described in light fiction, and the gossip of her fudge-eating girl friends about the joys of student life, had never appealed to her. Being a different kind of girl, she had acquired the equipment of a formal education in an informal way, after her grammar-school days, by the thorough use of the comprehensive family library, and by tutors when she wanted to brush up in her French. She had neglected the piano as a polite accomplishment, for she had no definite musical taste; but she had

developed an instinct for the beautiful in another direction—with crayon and brush. She sketched and painted, at first self-taught, and afterward in the Art Students' League, and she quickly proved that she possessed a decided gift for color and design. Ruth was, indeed, an artist of precocious talent.

Doctor Webster himself had encouraged her juvenile ambition to become another Rosa Bonheur. He had sound taste in the appreciation of pictures, and he saw that Ruth's immature efforts contained an unusual touch, before the elder Stanleys realized that they had something like a prodigy for their only offspring. It was the doctor who had recommended art-school instead of college, and Ruth, who had been too shy to express her own ambitions in that direction, felt grateful to him on that account.

The narrative of American family fortunes too often comes to a climax in an ominous event which is usually referred to as "the crash." So it was with the Stanleys, and in their case it brought the heart-break of a great grief as well as the bitterness of

financial disaster. Mr. Stanley, caught at the early age of fifty in one of those physical break-downs that are the penalty of over-work and lack of exercise, said one day that he was tired, and would lie down for a rest. He never got up. Doctor Webster and a colleague, murmuring obscure things about high blood pressure and hardened arteries, worked over him for two weeks, while Mrs. Stanley and Ruth served as nurses in twelve-hour shifts; but it was a losing fight. The human machine that had been the motive power of the Stanley household ran slowly down until it came to a full stop.

That happened when Ruth was seventeen. When she and her mother had recovered from the shock sufficiently to understand the report that Doctor Webster, as executor of the estate, submitted to them, they learned why the patient had been pursued through his fits of delirium by nameless demons of worry. They had been left with about one-tenth of the sum at which Mr. Stanley had been financially rated. Investments made in the hope of increasing the small Stanley fortune were represented by

worthless paper. There were heavy loans on the life insurance policies. There were documents marked I. O. U. by debtors who were N. G. The family home itself suddenly developed a case of mortgage. Mr. Stanley, it seemed, had been a good lawyer but a bad business man.

Doctor Webster took charge of this tangle and straightened it out. His strategy enabled the crippled estate to make a retreat in good order before the creditors, who swept down like Cossacks. He saved what there was to be saved, and even added a little to the assets by bluffing Mr. Stanley's legal partner into paying for the good-will to which he had fallen heir, and by selling the touring car at a better than second-hand price. He invested the residue on a sound six per cent basis, and when it was all over, Ruth and her mother had a little income on which, with rigid economy, they could manage to live, and the house, with its attendant mortgage. The holder of the mortgage, Doctor Webster assured them, would not worry about his interest for a year or two. He told them he had persuaded Judge

White, another of the late Mr. Stanley's friends, to take it up as an investment, but as a matter of fact, he had paid off the loan himself, and the judge merely served as a diplomatic screen for that act of generosity. Doctor Webster performed these offices of loyalty to the memory of his dead friend without ostentation. He was of the chivalrous type which masks its kindnesses. Ruth did not know one-half of the things he did for them, and her mother knew even less, because the shock of bereavement left her an almost helpless sufferer from nervous prostration.

So Ruth Stanley came to look upon Doctor Webster as the family protector, almost as a second father.

She remained in the art school for a year after her father's death, and worked assiduously to prepare herself for a professional career with brush and pencil. She had been very much in earnest at her studies before the distressing collapse of the family affairs, but the bereavement and its ensuing worries, protracted by her mother's illness, caused her to feel a burden of responsibility under which she struggled

all the harder to realize her ambition. She toiled like a slave in the classes and at home, and made rapid progress.

Doctor Webster continued to be a habitual visitor at the Stanley residence, in the dual capacity of medical and business adviser, and also as the devoted friend they had always known. His Sunday afternoon calls, lasting through tea-time, had been a tradition of the Stanley's social régime, and the custom was kept alive, with Ruth filling her father's place in the conversations. She had an alert mind ~~that~~ could keep pace with the doctor's ideas, if he did not become too philosophical. He was a kind of intellectual stimulant to her, and her young enthusiasm had a refreshing influence on him. They "got on" tremendously well together.

Occasionally, under the pretext that Mrs. Stanley needed fresh air, he would take them out for a motor-ride, or better still, into the country for a week-end excursion. Often, too, he would appear with tickets to a good play or a concert, and if Mrs. Stanley wasn't feeling well enough for such a frolic,

he and Ruth would go out unchaperoned, and enjoy themselves in a comradely way. These little parties organized by the doctor were Ruth's only diversions during that rather somber year, and she was grateful for them.

Then came that important day in June when Ruth was awarded the academic certificate which, if it didn't declare she was a full-fledged artist, at least testified that she had passed her novitiate's schooling with high honors, and could now go out into the world to try her luck. That simple little ceremony was accompanied by flowers from the doctor and tears of pride from the nervous Mrs. Stanley. The doctor took them home, with the diploma, white frock (Ruth's first after the period of mourning), bouquet, and all the other insignia of graduation day, in a taxicab.

En route, he did the astounding thing. He proposed.

"Ruth," he said, apropos of nothing at all, "I want you to be my wife. Wait as long as you want to, but marry me."

This circumstance itself will indicate that Doctor Webster could not, by any stretch of the imagination, be called a romantic character. Proposing on a girl's graduation day is good romantic form, and so is proposing in a taxicab, but when these two details are offset by the presence of the girl's mother, in mourning and a melancholy frame of mind, romance flies out the window.

That was like the doctor. He had a scientific directness of manner which caused him to cut corners when it would have been more graceful to go around the block. He had made up his mind to propose to Ruth the day she left school, and he would have done it in the presence of all the instructors if they had happened to be in the way.

The doctor was good-looking enough to satisfy any girl as a suitor, and he had an intellectual distinction that Ruth admired. He was invariably thoughtful, and gentle, and courteous. These, indeed, were his shining qualities. Although he was about eighteen years Ruth's senior, he was in that

period of hearty maturity which theoretically makes the best husbands.

Ruth heard his declaration with as much amazement as if it were the Angel Gabriel's trumpet. She gasped, and stammered vague and meaningless phrases. Her mother, however, was as calm as if her nerves had suddenly been restored to perfect health;—perhaps the doctor had taken the precaution of warning his patient about the impending surprise. At any rate, she beamed from Ruth to the doctor, and then back again, with a "Bless you, my children" smile.

The doctor said a few more words, informing Ruth, of course, that he loved her, had loved her as a child, and now loved her, deeply, devotedly and completely, as a young woman. Perhaps she was surprised; perhaps she wanted time to think it over. Well, she should have all the time she wanted. He would be waiting. And he would strive manfully to cherish her and make her happy, all her life long.

Ruth kept thinking, as he talked, what a true friend to her family this man had been, how he had

eased their distress, how he had lightened their burden, and how much wiser and greater than herself he was. She wondered, too, why he should want to marry such an insignificant thing as herself. And as she thought, her heart suddenly warmed toward him in a flush of emotion, and her eyes filled with tears.

She took his hand—a strong, supple, surgeon's hand it was—and held it caressingly between her own. The doctor smiled buoyantly, almost triumphantly, at her, and reached his free hand toward a vest pocket.

“Shall I put it on?” he asked, suddenly flashing a solitaire ring before her eyes.

She nodded, and whispered yes.

Then he kissed her, very gravely.

CHAPTER II

HER FIANCÉ

Mrs. STANLEY remained a semi-invalid, and a few months after the engagement of Ruth to Doctor Webster the latter prescribed a winter in California for his patient.

She did not want to go, but she could not stand up against the combined arguments and persuasions of her future son-in-law and her daughter. When she finally agreed to make the pilgrimage, she wanted to take Ruth with her, but she was voted down. They could not afford such a heavy expense, and besides, Ruth felt that although as a daughter her place was with her mother, as a prospective wage-earner her duty was to stay in New York and keep on working.

The doctor took sides with Ruth in the family debates over the projected trip, and finally brought Mrs. Stanley around with a happy compromise. He

arranged his professional affairs so that he might accompany his patient and see her safely lodged in an inexpensive resort where invalids sunned themselves twelve months in the year. Ruth, he pointed out, could remain at home, with Mrs. Franklin, who had been housekeeper and family retainer to the Stanleys for years, as her companion.

It was a reasonable arrangement. Mrs. Stanley had relatives in California, living in the very sanitarium town that Doctor Webster selected. She would not be home-sick there. On the other hand, Mrs. Franklin, who would look after Ruth, was more like a member of the family than a servant, and with her about the house the young artist would not get lonesome.

So the matter was carried through on that basis. There were tears at the parting, of course,—Mrs. Stanley and Mrs. Franklin were unusually lachrymose. The doctor surprised Ruth with the ardor of his good-by kiss, and promised to come back soon.

Mrs. Stanley found the climate of California

beneficial. She soon became reconciled to her period of exile, and then began to enjoy life again. Doctor Webster also discovered profit of another kind in his journey as Good Samaritan. Patients thrust themselves upon him out there in that paradise of invalids. Valetudinarians rich in purse and symptoms sought his advice and kept him busy.

He returned to New York within a few weeks, but promises of fat fees lured him westward several times after that. Whenever he was away he wrote Ruth daily letters, which she answered in groups, about once a week. Altogether, during that winter and spring, about half of his time was spent out of New York, but his practise in the east was kept up by a skilful assistant.

He missed his "little sweetheart," as he called Ruth, during these absences, much more than she knew, for he was not given to sentimental outbursts in his letters. They were love-letters, of course, but their burden was of strong, firmly established affection, rather than of romance. He was too reserved to indulge in verbal ecstasies.

Ralph Webster was, at heart, an idealist, a voiceless poet of the "art of healing." His scientific training had not hardened him, as it does many physicians, into a cold, materialistic view of life. Within the human clay whose ills and imperfections he dealt with professionally, he always felt the presence of the great mystery of the spirit. Intellectually, he was keenly pragmatic and modern, and the big brain back of his imposing forehead handled the problems of his work with a fine, mechanical precision. But emotionally he was a repressed mystic.

To his work, therefore, he brought an almost medieval spirit of reverence and devotion. He had studied and practised medicine with a kind of monkish zeal, and his life had been one of rigorous discipline in the exacting demands of his profession. He had made a brilliant success, both in practice and in research, but the greatest rewards of the physician's career for him had been its opportunities for social service. He gave more than a fair share of his time to the public hospitals; his charity

patients were numerous. Some of his colleagues used to say of him, jocularly, that he would rather administer advice and pills, gratis, in East Side tenements, than remove a wealthy appendix in an up-town mansion.

Upon the wall of his office there hung a framed copy of a document to which he was accustomed to refer all questions of professional ethics. It was the oath he had taken as a part of the medieval ceremonies of graduation from Heidelberg; an oath written four centuries before Christ—the Oath of Hippocrates.

“It is a little old-fashioned now,” he would say, “but no doctor will ever go wrong in spirit if he takes it to heart.”

He made a kind of personal creed out of that ancient document.

Doctor Webster had been content with his bachelorhood—and a fine, clean, strenuous celibacy it was—until he met Ruth Stanley. Then he fell in love, as he did everything, intensely and completely.

He had not looked forward to marriage as a happy release from his loneliness, and deliberately sought for an eligible wife. The thing had happened, that was all. He did not know when it came or how, but one day he looked upon this girl whom he had known since her childhood, and saw that she was the greatest gift he could ask of life. She would be the ultimate blessing.

He worshiped her with a shy and tender devotion, idealized her into a little goddess. These romances of sober middle-age are often more subtle expressions of the love-soul of the world than those of care-free youth; and Doctor Webster treated his like a poet. He was incapable of bursting into song, naturally enough, but spiritually he was kin to Petrarch.

The date of their marriage had been left open, by a kind of tacit agreement. He wanted to give her a chance to "find herself" before she assumed the rather exacting duties of a doctor's wife, and she took it for granted that hers was to be an indefinitely long engagement. Whenever the thought of being

married came into her head, she hurriedly ejected it. She was going to marry the doctor some time or other, that was all; and she would cross that bridge when she came to it.

The first suggestion of an imminent wedding came from her mother, in a letter written while the doctor was visiting her. It said:

“Ralph and I have been talking about you all day. I wonder if you know how terribly in love with you he is? I have begun to think you two should be married soon;—you have waited long enough already. Then I shall have a splendid son-in-law, and you a wonderful husband. I must be there, of course, and if I am well enough to go east this coming summer—say some time in June—I hope it will be then. Talk it over with Ralph when he gets back.”

The doctor made the return trip with the same idea in his mind, and whiled away the tedious journey with beatific musings upon the place Ruth would like best for a honeymoon.

CHAPTER III

ENTER AN ATHLETE

MEANWHILE Ruth herself had been leading a new kind of life. With her mother away, and the doctor often on the wing, she was the full mistress of her home and her affairs. She had come into a wholesome, invigorating freedom, after the restrictions and limitations of her shy, studious girlhood, and she reveled in it.

Day by day, it seemed to her, she could feel her wings grow. Her sense of independence was like a tonic; she came into bloom fast. A little while before she had been merely an overgrown child; now, as if by a miracle, she was a young woman. When Doctor Webster was away she did not miss him, but she faithfully wrote him a weekly letter, couched in phrases appropriate to their relationship, but lacking much of its spirit.

Old Mrs. Franklin, fussy, absent-minded and

talkative, attended to the house-keeping, while Ruth prepared to launch herself in a career as artist. She arranged the spacious living room of the house as a studio and "den" combined, thereby filling the New England soul of Mrs. Franklin with puritan horrors. She went in strongly for artistic "atmosphere" in her choice of fripperies for the adornment of her work-shop, but her taste was good and the effect achieved was charming.

She was still too naïve to be "cubist" or "futurist," and so her most revolutionary effect was an ancient Chinese incense burner, such as she had read about in magazine stories of "bohemian" life. In it she burned many a joss-stick to the artist's fetich—the God of Things As They Are, about whom she had read in Kipling's much quoted poem. To Mrs. Franklin's puritan nostrils, the incense had a high-church suggestion which she pronounced immoral, but Ruth persisted in this bizarre rite, in spite of the house-keeper's added warnings that such a reek in the air would certainly bring on asthma, hay-fever, epizootic, and other terrifying ailments of the res-

piratory tract. Mrs. Franklin even went so far as to mention "the heaves."

With the home thus transformed, Ruth joyously set to work, trying, like the usual beginner, to do the hardest things first. Landscape sketches, of real and imaginary scenes, she produced in quantities, but she nearly always left them unfinished, for portraits were her great ambition. Mrs. Franklin was her first model, and that old lady's protests, when she was compelled to pose in strained attitudes for hours while the house-keeping, as she said, "went to rack and ruin," were grievous indeed.

But Ruth also began to make friends, and to find time for the normal diversions of an American maiden just emerging from her 'teens. She had met many girls of her own kind and age at the art school, and some of these acquaintances carried over the dividing line of graduation to ripen into intimacies. There was one, of course, that was the Great Friendship upon which every girl lavishes her heart's best gifts of sentiment. Her name, in Ruth's case, was Della Forbush.

Della was older than Ruth by a couple of years, and much more worldly-wise. Her father was rich; her name was familiar to the society reporters, and she was devoted to the profession of having a good time before marriage should overtake her. She had entered the art school to gratify a whim, and to be able to talk the patter of art as a dinner-table accomplishment. She had taken a course or two, and then dropped out, for she had too keen a sense of humor to permit comparison between her primitive sketches and the clever work of the more earnest students. But so far as Ruth was concerned, she came, saw and conquered.

Della was dashing, witty and vivacious. She was an artist, at least, when she visited her modiste, and her costumes were the last word in smartness. Moreover, she was a specialist in the "modern dances," and had taken high-priced lessons from Mr. Chateau, Monsieur Eugène, and the other dancing demi-gods of the cafés. Her list of acquaintances among the debonair young men of Manhattan was both extensive and select. All of these talents of

Della's captivated Ruth's admiration. They represented to her the world of which she had seen too little and which she meant to vanquish. And on her part, Della fell in love with Ruth almost at first sight, and promptly adopted her both as friend and protégée.

Under the special auspices of the sprightly Miss Forbush, Ruth made many new friends, or acquaintances, rather, for she was too absorbed in her work to enlarge her circle of intimacies. Her horizon began to expand, however; she discovered that she lived in a populous world, and in one of the biggest and greatest cities thereof, and as her points of contact with life developed, her school-girl shyness began to wear away.

Della had a habit of swooping down upon her unawares, with a motor-car full of chattering companions who thought that to visit the studio of a feminine artist was a thrilling adventure in the bohemian life. They were, for the most part, of that curious species, numerous in New York, which might be called "atmosphere hunters"—giggling young

women who cultivated the intellectual pose because it gave them an opportunity to talk sex, and youths with a taste for the bizarre in clothes and ideas. They were all harmless enough, however, and Ruth forgave them their foolishness for Della's sake. Moreover, the parties they would improvise in the studio, much to the annoyance of Mrs. Franklin, who regarded the kitchen utensils they so blithely commandeered as her personal lares and penates, were amusing. Best of all, out of these hap-hazard visits Ruth occasionally got an order for a sketch or a water-color, for these young people had papas and mammas with money to spend in the patronage of the fine arts.

But Della's circle was not limited to such types as these. Being rich and attractive, with a taste for flirtation, she was pursued by a pack of eligible males who ranged between the ages of twenty and forty; and since she had a kind of universal genius for amusing herself, these admirers were of many different kinds. She had her dancing men, her golf men, her polo men, her Wall Street men, her rising

young professional men, and her college men. The pet and prize of the collection was a certain Mr. John Bowling, eternally known as "Jack."

He was on Della's student list, but by birth, breeding and paternal income he seemed to belong to several of the other categories as well—certainly to all of the outdoor varieties, for he was an athlete. A New Yorker of three generations, he had chosen to get his academic training on his native asphalt, so there he was, close to home, a junior in Columbia University, captain of the track team, and prize runner of the college at any distance from a mile up.

He had come close to the world's record for a mile; had tied it for two miles, and was preparing himself, by sedulous cultivation of his legs and lung capacity, for a whirl at that classic test of endurance called "the Marathon." His heart was set upon winning this event at the Olympian games, and so his college work was directed toward adding wings to his heels rather than to his imagination. Jack had all the modern Marathon records at his tongue's

end; but to save his life he could not have told you that the first Marathon runner's name was Pheidipides, or that the Marathon distance was twenty-five miles because a Persian invasion ended in rout that far away from Athens in the year 490 B. C. His knowledge of classic lore was limited, but his collegiate fame was great.

Jack was a hero to Della, and of course she had to show him to Ruth. It was, however, an eccentric introduction. Ruth was taken by surprise, and if she had not been an art-school graduate, accustomed to the candor of the "life class," she would have been shocked. For her first glimpse of Jack Bowling was in the semi-nudity of his running costume, a garment rather less protective than a bathing suit.

CHAPTER IV

RUTH FINDS A MODEL

JACK BOWLING was a splendid animal:—that was one way to describe him, and, for his athletic semi-nudity, the most appropriate. Any observer, under those conditions, would have appraised him in points of muscle, depth of chest and grace of limb, as if he were a race-horse or a grey-hound. He was as lithe as a panther; all his movements had a swift, sleek power. His face was handsome in an alert, boyish way. The young men rejoicing in their strength and fleetness at the Olympian games of ancient Greece, robust and beautiful at their play, glowing with the healthful spirit of happy athletes, must have been like him.

Della called merrily to Ruth through the opened studio window:

“Come on and let us in, Ruthie! He’s perfectly tame!”

Ruth went to the door. She had seen hundreds of men sunning themselves at the bathing beaches

as scantily attired as Mr. Bowling, when he was presented to her, but nevertheless she blushed. On the beach, the water was an excuse; in the "life class" the lofty purpose of art had drawn a chaste veil over such revelations, or worse; but here—in the open street—on her very door-step!

She gasped a little. In fact, she wavered between shaking hands with Bowling and calling for a barrel. She decided on the less drastic course, however, and gave him her hand timidly. Bowling, who was used to stalking about at intercollegiate track meets under thousands of eyes in just such a costume, did not have a tremor of self-consciousness. He had a kind of Hellenic instinct for nakedness. Moreover, in his combination of abbreviated breeches and sleeveless jerkin, immaculately white, with the emblem of his university on his breast, he felt himself clothed according to the world's desire. Very contented with himself was Jack Bowling, then and always.

"He was out for a practice run in the park," explained Della. "I caught him and brought him over in my car to show you. Isn't he wonderful?"

Ruth didn't answer,—she was looking at Jack.

She didn't want to look at him, but she couldn't help it. She stared.

"Why, Ruth, I believe you are blushing," exclaimed Della gaily. "He *is* unconventional, but I'm used to seeing him this way."

Ruth finally found her tongue.

"I'm afraid you'll catch cold, Mr. Bowling," she said politely. "I have an old dressing gown of father's. I'll get it for you."

She found the gown and Jack draped it about his shoulders gratefully, observing in a professional way that it wasn't a good thing to stop and cool off in the middle of a morning's run. It stiffened you up, he declared. Freddie Donlin would make an awful howl about it, if he were around.

"Freddie Donlin," said Della, in a foot-note tone of voice to Ruth, "is the team's trainer. Freddie's a scream!"

The conversation rambled on its athletic course. Ruth learned that Bowling was training for the international Olympian games, to be held at Stockholm in the coming summer; that the university would send a team of which he was captain; that

he intended to enter the formidable Marathon race (the ultimate test of endurance); and that he was going to win if he broke a leg or a lung in doing it. Della knew all the men on Jack's team, and what their special talents were. She displayed a profound scholarship in running records, particularly those that appertained to the long-distance events; and she discoursed upon them learnedly.

This was a new form of gossip to Ruth, and she was surprised to find herself developing an interest in it. When she learned that the bath-robed youth who sat before her, tearing holes in her best oriental rug with the spikes on his running shoes, had won the American championship for two miles last year, and was regarded by certain sporting writers as equal to any of the crack English lopers at that distance, she almost applauded.

Tea was served by Mrs. Franklin, who almost fainted at the sight of Jack.

"I don't think it's proper," she said primly to nobody in particular, when she recovered from the shock, "for anybody to go about with no more clothes on than that."

"Why, that's his running suit," Ruth explained.

Mrs. Franklin remarked that it didn't amount to much.

"Well, he wears it when he's running in the park," Della added, "and no one objects."

"No doubt," observed Mrs. Franklin acidly, as she withdrew, "but he keeps on running."

The firmness with which Della's hero refused cakes, marmalade or any form of sweets, and chose dry toast with his tea, impressed Ruth.

"Training rules," he told her, in a virtuous tone. "Can't touch anything sweet."

Ruth admired such discipline and abstinence.

"Have a pill, Jack?" asked Della teasingly. She opened a dainty little gold case, lit a slender, feminine cigarette, and insolently blew a puff of smoke in his face. (Mrs. Franklin, who was then removing the tea things, broke a cup in repressing her fury at this wanton spectacle.)

Jack groaned bitterly as he jerked his head away from temptation—a dual temptation, since Della's pretty face was very close to his.

"Cut it out, Della," he said peevishly. "I'm dy-

ing for a smoke, but it can't be done in training, and the smell of it drives me crazy."

"Have a puff, then," said Della diabolically, holding out her cigarette.

"No," he growled resolutely. "Don't tempt me."

"Spartan youth!" murmured Della, approvingly to Ruth. "I shall tell Freddie Donlin he's been very good to-day."

Jack soon departed to resume his methodical trot along the bridle path in the park. Some of the citizens past whose surprised gaze he flitted thought he was a prize-fighter training for a match; others thought he was a moving picture actor; but the majority thought he was crazy, and ought to be arrested. An occasional small boy, however, recognized him from newspaper pictures; gave a gleeful shout, and ran along beside him for a while, hoping thereby to acquire athletic merit. Jack was ordinarily flattered by such juvenile attentions, but that day he gave no smile or merry word to his little escorts. He was thinking of a girl—an earnest, pensive girl in an artist's smock, who said hardly anything, but stared with lustrous eyes.

"Well, Ruthikins," said Della, after Jack had gone, "what's the verdict on my hero? Don't you like him? You've been sitting there like a graven image, without a word to say."

"I think he's very beautiful," Ruth answered soberly, as if she were speaking of a sun-set instead of a man. "He'd make a wonderful picture."

"That's a brilliant idea!" exclaimed Della. "You must paint his portrait! Paint him as you saw him, in his running suit, and I'll buy the picture from you at your own price."

"Do you think he would pose for me?"

"He'd jump at the chance. When it comes to posing for pictures, Jack is as obliging as Francis X. Bushman."

"How will we manage it?"

"He can gallop over this way two or three times a week, and pose for an hour, thus combining art with exercise. Leave it to me, Ruth; I'll be the stage manager."

So it came about that Ruth found a model, and began to try her hand at a full length portrait.

CHAPTER V

THE RUNNER STUMBLES

THE suggestion that Ruth Stanley would like to paint his portrait met with Jack Bowling's enthusiastic approval, as Della had foretold. The studio, therefore, became an objective point of his practice runs, and on certain appointed afternoons every week he would come trotting down the street toward her home (having discarded spiked soles for tennis shoes in order to make the jaunt comfortably), and Ruth would be waiting there with her brushes and easel ready, while Della would be on hand as chaperone. He seldom came alone, however; usually he was accompanied by Freddie Donlin, his trainer, who rode beside him on a bicycle as pace-maker, professional counselor, and bearer of sweaters, adhesive tape for blistered heels, and lemons—a fruit believed to have some marvelous power for assuaging the fatigue of jaded runners.

This Freddie Donlin was a droll demonstration of the cultural value of college athletics. His student days were over. He had managed to squeak through the prescribed courses of study to a degree of Bachelor of Arts two years before, but instead of going out into the world to conquer, according to the advice of the commencement day orators, he had clung closely to the gymnasium where so much of his time in college had been spent, and had contrived to get on the pay-roll of his Alma Mater as the guide, philosopher and friend of aspiring athletes. He directed the elementary calisthenics of a few gymnasium classes, but his important duties were with the members of the track team, and those who strove to qualify for places in that exalted organization.

Runners were Freddie's specialty, for he had been one himself. He coached them, groomed them, and watched over them with the enthusiasm of a fanatic. He praised or rebuked them, according to their performances; he told them how they should eat, drink, and sleep; he was the fate that directed

their lives. He was, moreover, the wag of the training table and the low comedian of the athletic field. Deficient in personal ambition, his dreams of conquest by the team he coached were Napoleonic. A "gym rat" was the picturesque definition for Freddie in the college vernacular. But he was a pervasive and influential rodent, amusing enough to be a welcome member of the "easel parties," as Della called them, of which Jack Bowling was the central figure.

The picture progressed, and Ruth and Jack became very good friends—too good, Della occasionally thought, with a twinge of jealousy. The buoyant athlete made no attempt to conceal his admiration for the demure artist, and Della, who regarded him as her personal property, began to feel neglected.

Della had to admit, of course, in her silent consideration of the matter, that Jack was an habitual "fusser," accustomed to exchange flattery and flirtatious persiflage with every pretty girl he met. But on this occasion, she thought, wasn't he becoming

a little too ardent? She could not criticize Ruth, however, for Jack's collegiate romancing seemed to meet with no response from her. She would only smile shyly at his compliments, and keep on painting. But her very silence was vexing;—Della would have felt more comfortable if Ruth had responded in the customary way, with challenging merriment and banter. Could it be possible that the child, as Della, who felt infinitely more grown-up, called her friend, was taking Jack Bowling too seriously? Well, anyway—and then Della would shrug her shoulders and put the topic out of her mind.

One morning, when the picture was nearly finished, Ruth received a telegram. She read it with a little shock of surprise, sighed, and then fell into that state of abstraction commonly called a "brown study," absent-mindedly plucking at the message until she had torn it into little bits.

It was from Doctor Webster, announcing his return from California, and his intention to call that afternoon. He had sent it from the train the night before.

A few hours later Della arrived, to help at another sitting, and found Ruth in a rather melancholy mood. Jack and Freddie Donlin had not yet appeared, and it was already past the time they usually came. The two girls waited for half an hour, and then became impatient, Ruth particularly so. She perched in the window-seat, and peered anxiously down the street.

"What do you suppose makes them so late to-day?" she asked.

"I can't imagine. Something must have happened. Jack may have fractured his wrist watch."

"I hoped they would come early to-day," Ruth continued. "I *did* want Mr. Bowling to pose for me just once more before——"

"Before what?" asked Della pertly, as she began to stitch at a hat-band of college colors she had been making for her "hero," who was fond of such regalia.

"Well," Ruth faltered, "Doctor Webster is back in town, and he's coming over this afternoon."

"What difference does it make, my dear, if Ralph Webster does come over?"

"He might not like the idea of my painting Mr. Bowling's picture."

Della laughed.

"Why Ruth, how absurd!" she exclaimed. "You are painting Jack Bowling's picture for *me*, and I am paying for it,—or will when it's finished."

"Still——" Ruth started to say something, and stopped suddenly. She went to the easel, and pretended to be interested in preparing her palette. Della waited for her to begin again, but became impatient when Ruth smeared away at her daubs of color without a word. She dropped her embroidery, marched over to Ruth, and took her by the shoulders.

"What's the matter?" she demanded, giving her a sisterly shake. "Out with it!"

"I don't know," said Ruth dreamily. "I wish I did. I wish I had gone to California with mother. I've been thinking a lot about her lately. I'd give a great deal for a talk with her this evening."

"Oh, the doctor will soon be on hand to cheer you up," Della replied.

"You don't think he'll object to my painting the picture?"

"Doctor Webster is a man of sense," Della observed sagely. "He loves you devotedly, and when a man loves a girl he only sees the girl—not what she is doing. Take it from me, love is blind—or at least cross-eyed."

"Well, anyway, I wish the boys would hurry," Ruth remarked with more animation. "I simply can't get the expression of Mr. Bowling's eyes."

She looked at the picture intently, and added:

"He has wonderful eyes."

"They are nice, but I don't know that I'd call them 'wonderful,'" Della answered coolly.

"I never saw eyes like them."

"Well, if you can't get their expression, why don't you go ahead with the figure?" Della advised, with a glance at the picture. "He certainly has *some* figure.—Most men have no figures at all—nothing but mere bodies."

Just then the door-bell rang violently. Ruth thrust her palette into Della's hands, and darted to answer. In the hall-way she gave a cry of alarm:

"What's the matter?—Oh, Mr. Bowling! You've hurt yourself!"

Jack Bowling's appearance confirmed Ruth's remark. He came in limping, leaning on the shoulder of Freddie Donlin, who was looking worried. A wound on his left leg was bleeding freely.

"Don't tell me he has hurt one of those beautiful legs!" Della exclaimed at the sight of him.

Ruth had sympathetically rushed to his aid, intending to take his free arm to give him additional support, but with a laugh he placed it around her waist.

"You can go now," he said to Freddie, with a grin. "This is the kind of support I need."

But Freddie stuck to his post.

"Only a scratch on the shin and a twisted ankle," said Jack cheerfully, to Della. "I'd have twisted both ankles long ago for a chance to do this,"—and

he gave Ruth a vigorous hug. "Run away, Freddie, I need that other arm."

Jack pushed Donlin away, not without professional remonstrances from the solicitous expert in shin-bones and ankles, and Della slid in to take his place. So, with a girl at each shoulder, Jack hobbled toward an easy chair.

"Be careful! Don't step on that flat tire!" warned Freddie, fluttering about like an anxious hen. "Better cover up that mother-may-I-go-out-to-swim costume! He'll catch cold!"

Ruth hurried away to get the dressing gown which was now Jack's special property, while Freddie kept on jabbering:

"Don't talk, Jack! Don't say a word! Every time you open your mouth, you open the wound."

"Just look at that ugly cut!" said Della, with a shudder.

"That's where he was bitten by his pet canary," Freddie explained jocosely.

"How did it happen?"

"He stubbed his toe on a four-leaf clover, and the road flew up and hit him."

Ruth appeared with the dressing gown, and tenderly helped Jack put it on. Then Freddie, seeing his charge comfortably bestowed, said he would run back to retrieve the bicycle and Jack's sweater-coat, which had been abandoned at the scene of the accident, not far down the street.

Della appealed to him anxiously.

"Will it interfere with his running the Marathon?"

Freddie turned back and hooted derisively:

"I wouldn't worry if he had broken his leg. All I'd have to do then would be to stand at the finish and wave a skirt—and he'd win running on his hands."

With this Parthian shot of campus wit, Freddie scuttered away on his errand, but the girls refused to take his cynical view of the case. They hovered helpfully over the injured athlete, in the ministering angel manner. Ruth brought a pillow for his damaged foot, and Della placed another behind his back.

They fussed over him prettily, asking if he was quite comfortable, and if he was feeling faint.

Jack grinned his appreciation, and thanked them in his usual vein of flattery.

"If I could have a pair of trained nurses like you, I'd want to be laid up all the time."

Then Ruth became more practical, and tried to remember what she had read about first-aid to the injured. She said the wound should be bathed and made sterile with peroxide of hydrogen, and that an ice-pack would help the swollen ankle, if she could improvise one. If Della would fan the patient while she was gone, she would run up-stairs to the medicine cabinet.

Jack eyed her admiringly.

"You know all about first-aid, don't you, little artist?" he remarked, with a silky, caressing tone in his voice, quite different from his usual blunt, boyish manner of speech.

Della sniffed, and said frigidly:

"She ought to—she's going to be a doctor's wife."

"I wish I had studied medicine," Jack answered.

This verbal foot-note to her status as Ralph Webster's *fiancée*, in the presence of Jack Bowling, embarrassed Ruth, and she hurried away. She had never told Bowling that she was engaged and she had always evaded the topic in his presence. Nevertheless he knew, and she knew that he knew.

He had asked Della, in private, for information about the solitaire diamond that sparkled so impressively upon the third finger of Ruth's palette hand, and Della had told Ruth about the incident afterward. But he had never alluded to the matter again; he, too, seemed to be afraid of it.

CHAPTER VI

JACK DECLARES HIMSELF

"WHEN is that doctor of Ruth's coming back from California?" Jack asked, as soon as Ruth was out of the room.

"Ruth!" Della echoed, in her best chaperone style. "Since when did you two start calling each other by your first names?"

"Never mind that;—what about the medical gentleman?"

"Well, if it's any comfort to you," Della drawled, "he's already in New York, and he's going to call here this afternoon. So Ruth will not be able to see quite *so much* of you, from now on."

"Oh, I don't know about that," remarked Jack brightly.

"Well, I do. For one thing, you will have more clothes on when you come in the future. This will be the last sitting for the picture in your,—well, as

you are. I should call it in 'the almost altogether.' In the future you'll be completely clothed, if not in your right mind."

"Ruth didn't say that, did she?"

"No, she didn't. But she did tell me—some time ago—that she and the doctor were going to marry soon after he returned."

Jack looked blank, and then muttered: "He's in a rush, that fellow."

"Not at all," Della answered crisply. "Doctor Webster is not one of the rushy kind. They have been engaged for a year. Do you see anything precipitate about that, Mr. Hero?"

Della rose and walked over to the easel.

"I wonder," she murmured ironically, "what I am going to do with this picture of you when it is finished. It's going to be a kind of a white elephant, I'm afraid."

"You might make me a present of it."

She smiled at him, and then went behind him, and ran her fingers through his kinky yellow hair.

"Gee, you just hate yourself, don't you, Jack?"

she said, as if she were talking to a small boy.—“Or I might have it hung in a Subway car as an ad for B. V. D.’s.”

Jack reached up and took hold of her hand.

“It was bully of you to get Ruth to paint my portrait,” he said affectionately.

“*Miss Stanley*, I believe you mean?”

“I mean Ruth, and from now on I’m going to call her Ruth,” he announced aggressively.

Then Della plumped herself into a chair, glared at Jack, and proceeded to read him a curtain-lecture that had been on her mind for some time.

“See here, Jack Bowling, I didn’t introduce you to Ruth Stanley and engage her to paint a picture of you to give you an opportunity to fall in love with her. I want you to understand that flirting and philandering are distinctly out of order, this time. She is to be married to one of the finest men I ever knew, and I want you to leave her alone. Nearly all the girls in my set have had a crush on you, Mr. Heart-breaker; there are three of them now who won’t speak to me because they think I cut them out.

I don't care what they think, and I don't care what you think, but I do care for Ruth and the doctor, and I'm not going to let you interfere with their happiness. Do you understand?"

Jack listened to this vigorous little discourse on etiquette and ethics with a smile that broadened into a grin. When Della finished, he broke out into a roar of laughter;—any hint of his attractiveness to the other sex pleased Jack immensely.

His amusement was so contagious that Della started to laugh too; then, finding that her missionary work was apparently futile, she boxed Jack's ears good-naturedly, and gave up the attempt.

"Oh, there's no use talking to you," she exclaimed. She dangled before his eyes the hat-band she was making for him, and added gaily:

"Now do you know what I'm going to do? I just think I'll give this hat-band to Freddie Donlin, and not to you."

"I don't know that I'd wear it anyway," Jack retorted teasingly.

Whereupon Della called him "a mean thing," with some emphasis.

"You're not angry with me?" he pleaded, in mock alarm.

"You're incorrigible," she said. "I can't be angry with a hopeless pagan. You remind me of a Russian dancer in a goat-skin costume I saw at a show last week."

"A faun, you mean," said the irrepressible Jack, airing his little learning.

"Well, whatever he was, he was altogether too fresh, in a certain way that I won't describe. You're like him, Jack; you're too—too primitive."

This conversation was broken by the re-appearance of Ruth, with her hands full of amateur surgical equipment. She carried a small bowl of warm water, some peroxide, a sponge, an ice-pack, improvised from a hot-water bottle, and a white linen ruffle which, for lack of proper bandage material, she had torn off one of her own underskirts. She kneeled down by Jack's side, and went to work earnestly.

"The room will have to be very quiet while this painful operation is going on," Jack observed, with a wink at Della. "Suppose you run out to meet Freddie, and help him carry my rags."

Della took the hint, but not with good grace. She flounced out, with certain symptoms of vexation.

"You shouldn't tease Della," Ruth said, as she carefully bathed the cut on his shin.

"Della's a good pal, all right," he answered, "but—ever since I've known you, why—you're the girl for me!"

He said that as if he meant it.

"You must not talk to me like that, Mr. Bowling," Ruth replied shyly.

"Mister! Why the Mister?"

"Jack, then," she added.

"That's better. Della tells me we're not to have any more of these visits."

"I'm afraid so.—Does that hurt?"

She was cleansing the wound with peroxide.

Jack looked down at her fondly, and answered:

"You couldn't hurt me, except by keeping away from me."

Ruth pretended not to hear him, and prepared to put on the bandage. She laughed as she held the ruffle up for his inspection. Then she tied it around his leg, rather clumsily. The thing looked more a fantastic garter than it did like a bandage.

Jack watched her intently, and then suddenly reached down and caught her hands. The touch of her skin stirred him like wine.

"You're a wonder!" he exclaimed. "I'm in love with you!"

His eyes, with a kind of strange glow in them, were close to hers, and as she felt that steady, dominating gaze, and the strong grip of his hands, she began to grow weak and giddy. She stammered unintelligibly, and struggled to get away.

"Won't you—won't you let me go?" she murmured.

"No, I won't! I won't!" he said intensely. "I can't stop coming here! I can't give you up!"

"You must not hold my hands!" Ruth whispered,

feebly trying to break his grip. "Ralph may be here any moment. We must not see each other again."

"He doesn't love you as I do," Jack ran on fiercely. "He's wrapped up in his profession. We mustn't love each other, you think,—but we do. The first time I saw you, I knew we were meant for each other. You knew it, too! We can't help that! We can't!"

Ruth tore her hands away from him, and arose, trembling as if she were going to faint.

"Jack, Jack,!" she pleaded. "Don't talk that way! We must not see each other again. I can't bear it."

A step in the hall warned them, and they became silent. Then Della burst in triumphantly, carrying a sweater and a coat over her arm.

"Here's some of your stuff, my lord," she called out. "Freddie is bringing the rest of it. What do you say?"

"Go back and do it all over again," Jack answered sullenly.

Della called him a "grouch," and began to study Ruth's surgical work, making facetious comments on the bandage, and the ice-pack which flopped clumsily at his ankle. Then Freddie popped in, the impressive bearer of a bath-robe and other raiment belonging to his charge. He caught sight of the adornments on Jack's injured leg, and gave a shrill whistle.

"Some decoration!" he observed. "Here's your own blanket. Better slip on it—I mean slip it on, and protect yourself from the hot air."

Ruth took the bath-robe from him, and went to Jack to help him make the change. Della also offered her assistance, while Freddie stood by giving voluble directions.

Just then the door-bell tinkled, but Ruth was too absorbed in Jack's needs to wonder who the visitor might be. Mrs. Franklin answered.

Jack had risen to his feet, while the girls were fussing around him, and an incautious step promptly caused him to be aware that a twisted ankle is no matter for jest. The leg seemed to give way, and he staggered. Ruth and Della, with a simultaneous

cry of alarm, rushed to his support, and he recovered his balance by embracing them.

Freddie mopped his brow with a sigh of relief, and said:

"That was a narrow escape. I thought you had spilled him."

Jack grinned, and drew the girls closer to him.

"Go break your leg, Freddie," he exclaimed joyously. "You don't know what you are missing."

"Pretty soft for some people," Freddie jeered. "But the only way for me to get any admiration is to go into the movies."

"Della is a charitable soul," Jack remarked playfully. "See if she isn't. Pretend you've sprained your ankle. She'll support your tottering frame."

Della tossed her head and declared that Freddie didn't have the nerve for such a prank.

"I'll show you if I haven't," Freddie proclaimed. "Here's where I become a hero too."

He put a cautious arm around her waist, with the remark:

“As the newspapers say, ‘the enemy made an encircling movement with the left wing.’ ”

Della fled from him with shrieks of comic dismay. He followed like a cave-man in quest of his chosen woman, and Della, in trying to double on her trail, flopped fairly into his embrace. It was a fair capture and Freddie took advantage of it.

Jack and Ruth, still linked affectionately together, were laughing, and the petulant Della was trying to free an arm so that she might slap Freddie’s face, when the door opened, and, unannounced by the forgetful Mrs. Franklin, some one stepped in on the merry party.

It was Doctor Webster.

CHAPTER VII

THE DOCTOR'S RETURN

THE situation was distinctly embarrassing for every one. For a fraction of a second the young people stood petrified in their affectionate attitudes, and then, with the self-consciousness of children caught at a forbidden game, they broke away.

Ruth's *fiancé* had halted in the door-way. Behind him, even more formal of appearance, was another visitor, who also looked as if he didn't understand what it was all about. This was Judge White, who had been one of Ruth's father's friends and professional associates since they had studied law together.

Freddie released Della with a blank look, giving the impression that he had been nabbed in the act of stealing jam from the pantry. Della fluttered away to a safe distance, and actually blushed for the first time since she learned to fox-trot. Jack dropped

his arm from Ruth's waist, and hobbled unaided back to his chair, in a palpable sulk. He had never seen Doctor Webster before, but he sensed the presence of the enemy.

Ruth was the most self-possessed member of the quartet. She flushed up a little, but promptly did the best thing under the circumstances.

"Ralph!" she exclaimed affectionately, and went to greet him, not like a sweetheart, certainly, but much like a frank, comradely sort of daughter, with her lips ready to be kissed.

Doctor Webster relaxed his stiff perplexity, caught her hands eagerly, and gave her a formal salutation, of the kind permitted in company to prospective husbands. In other words, he kissed her with genial decorum, and then warmly asked: "How's my little girl?"

Judge White stepped up, with a cordial chuckle, to shake hands with Ruth, who then introduced her friends.

Della had already met the doctor, of course, but the judge was new to her. She gave him a quick,

appraising look, and seemed to find him satisfactory, for she immediately released her most charming manner. That was Della's way:—she either refused to give a new man a second thought, or immediately proceeded to captivate him. She decided immediately that she was going to like the judge. He was a hale, well-fed, genial bachelor of middle age. He had reached the doubtful forties, but he hadn't been on the bench long enough to acquire the hard mahogany finish of the judiciary, and had kept the sap of youth running in his blood by assiduous devotion to that modern elixir of life called golf. Della instantly told herself that she liked the type.

The two collegians were also presented to the two professional men, of course, and the moment of embarrassment passed by without social friction.

Doctor Webster's eye took note of Jack's bandaged leg immediately:

"What is it?" he asked. "Private theatricals, or an accident?"

"Not a very serious accident," Ruth said, as she

went over to her easel, and covered the tell-tale portrait.

"Is it a sprain?"

"I'm not quite sure," Jack answered casually.

"Ruth put an ice pack on it."

His familiar use of her name gave Ruth a start. The doctor glanced at her inquiringly, and then took up his medical kit (a professional call or two in that neighborhood was on his afternoon's schedule) to see what could be done for Jack. He gave the injured leg an examination, not more than ten seconds in length.

"What's this?" he asked, pointing at the bandage.

"A ruffle," Jack explained coolly.

Freddie started a guffaw, and was covertly hushed by Della.

"So I see," said the doctor dryly. "I meant, the nature of the injury?"

"Oh, just a little scratch," Jack assured him.

"Ruth put some peroxide on it, and tied it up with a ruffle from an old skirt."

"A very good job," was the doctor's comment on

Ruth's handiwork. "The ankle will be all right in a little while. The ice-pack will reduce the swelling. But I think the scratch needs a regular bandage,—if you will permit me."

He set to work with quick, deft fingers, while Ruth looked on, and Judge White began an animated exchange of small talk with Della. Freddie's attempts to explain to the judge the world-disturbing effects of a twisted ankle on his star Marathon runner were utterly lost on that luminary of the bench, while Della seemed to have forgotten that Freddie was alive.

By the time Doctor Webster had wound a scientific bandage around Jack's leg, and Mrs. Franklin had removed the bowl of water, the snips of gauze, and all the other evidences of medical work, Judge White announced his intention of starting on his way home, if he could borrow a supply of gasoline for his thirsty motor-car. Ruth took him out to the garage, which had once sheltered the Stanleys' popular-priced car (now a thing of the past) to see

if some "juice," as the judge called it, couldn't be found.

Then, since Jack Bowling and the doctor didn't seem to have much to say to one another, Della began to chatter.

"Isn't it a pity, doctor, that Ruth has to give up this beautiful home?"—She was familiar with Ruth's affairs, and believed that the family homestead was to be sold so that Ruth and her mother might enlarge their slender capital.

"Yes," he observed hesitantly. "But she seemed quite reconciled to it when I went away."

"She's a clever artist," Della ran on. "I'm sure she can turn her talent to some account. She has been talking of fitting up a little studio apartment."

Doctor Webster thought that might be a good idea, and said as much. He added that he would be the last one to oppose her if she had really set her heart on such an establishment.

"I think it would be great!" Freddie sung out, in a way that fairly thrust himself into a conversation to which he didn't belong.

The doctor looked at him curiously, and there was a touch of irony in his dry ejaculation: "Do you?"

"Yes," protested Freddie. "A girl with talent like hers is too young to—to——"

"To do what, Mr. Donlin?"

"To settle down."

"Do you think if she were to 'settle down'—by which I suppose you mean to get married—it would interfere with her artistic career?"

"Certainly I do," Freddie declared. "No one ever heard of a married woman amounting to anything."

The doctor might have disregarded this jejune utterance as being unworthy of his attention, but he was of an argumentative temperament, and loved a debate. So he proceeded to hand Freddie a crusher.

"Perhaps you never heard of Mrs. Elizabeth Barrett Browning?"

Freddie had, of course, in some dreary course in English literature, but his ideas on that lady were extremely vague. He knew he had been floored intellectually, however, and withdrew from the com-

bat into silence, but not without a stubborn shake of the head which seemed to say that Mrs. Browning was no sort of a person to be compared with Ruth Stanley. Della and Jack then proceeded to stab the fallen gladiator with verbal brutality.

"Or Carrie Nation?" grinned Jack, following the doctor's use of the historic example.

"Or Hetty Green?" jeered Della.

"Or Mrs. Vernon Castle?" gloated Jack, with an air of giving the *coup de grâce*.

"And you shouldn't forget you had a mother," giggled Della, using the argument for which there is no answer.

The doctor stopped the massacre, proclaiming the discussion as unnecessary, and announcing that he and Ruth would have no difficulty in coming to an understanding on the point.

Then Jack became restless. The doctor's proprietary manner in speaking about Ruth annoyed him. He wanted to go.

"I wonder if the judge would haul me over

to the gym in his car?" he growled, at no one in particular.

The doctor spoke up promptly for the judge, saying of course he would. Then Freddie briskly announced he would be on his way back with the bicycle, and after a few professional admonitions to Jack about the ankle he departed. Doctor Webster started out toward the garage to notify the judge that he would have a passenger, and as he passed by Ruth's easel he stopped, lifted the curtain, and examined the picture.

"Ah, I see Ruth has been working on a new picture," he remarked stiffly, glancing from the picture to Jack, and then back again. "A very good likeness. A very good likeness indeed."

With which he went out in search of Judge White.

"Well, what do you think of him?" Della asked, —meaning Doctor Webster, of course—as soon as she and Jack were left alone together.

"I'm not thinking of him," said Jack glumly. "I'm thinking of myself. It's just my luck to find the one girl who could make me happy engaged."

Della winced. She hadn't expected such frankness, and it hurt her, in several ways. For one thing, it caused her to feel that she herself was to blame for this trying situation, and, for another, it caused a little imp of jealousy to stir in her heart.

"It's all my fault," she said, with agitation. "I should have known just what would happen. I'm sorry I ever brought you here."

"I'm not," Jack answered, smiling in a significant way.

"Surely you're not going to try to——"

"I mean I'm going to have it out with the doctor!" Jack stated firmly.

Della's temper flared up. That sort of thing wasn't included in her idea of a gentleman's code of conduct. She announced that she washed her hands of the whole affair, and that Jack ought to be ashamed of himself for trying to come between a man and his promised wife. With which, she picked up her hat and her hand-bag, wished Jack a caustic good-day, and started for the door.

Just then Ruth came in, and Della bolted past her.

"Why, Della, where are you going?" Ruth asked.

"To more agreeable company."—This with a fling of her head which indicated Jack. "Where are the doctor and the judge?"

"Still fussing with the gasoline."

"Then I'll go and fuss with them."

As the door slammed, Ruth turned toward Jack timidly. She was sorry Della had left them alone together again. She shuddered a little, for the nervous strain of the last half-hour was beginning to tell on her, and there was something like fear in her heart.

CHAPTER VIII

YOUTH CALLS TO YOUTH

JACK had an elemental quality of bluntness in his character. When he had made up his mind to do anything, he drove straight toward his purpose, without any pause to consider the consequences. He had begun making love to Ruth, and he didn't intend to stop, now that he had another chance, whether Doctor Webster was at hand or not. He wasted no time in coming to the point.

"Ruth," he said, "I'm going to speak to Doctor Webster. I'm going to tell him——"

"No! No!" she interrupted, almost hysterically, as she caught his meaning. "You must not! It would be ungrateful of me to let you! I forbid it!"

"I know how you feel," he said more gently. "You think it's your duty. You think you must sacrifice yourself for him. But"—he paused, and then went on as if this were the conclusive argument—"I'm crazy about you!"

"I mustn't listen to you!" she exclaimed, and then ran on rapidly, as if she were delivering a speech she had learned by rote. "Ralph means so much to me. Mother went away with the understanding that we were to be married. That was the reason she left me here. It would break her heart if we weren't! No! No!"

She unconsciously came nearer to him, and added softly:

"I don't want to hurt you, Jack. I'm sorry we ever met. But—I can't spoil Ralph's life. I can't!"

He reached out and took her hands, drawing them up to his breast.

"I never dreamed I could feel for any one as I do for you," he said, with a break in his voice. "See, whenever you are near my hands instinctively reach out to yours. It's irresistible, Ruth. It's fate. We were meant for each other. The sooner he finds it out, the better for him. Even if you should marry him, I will not give you up. We can't stop loving each other, can we?"

She hung her head, afraid of what he might see in her eyes.

"Look at me, Ruth!" he urged. "You love me? Tell me! You do love me! I know it!"

The warm, firm grip of his hands sent a thrill through her blood. His voice was vibrant and caressing; it seemed to appeal and to command. It was saying the things she herself wanted to hear him say, though her conscience told her they were forbidden. She tried to answer, to repeat some of the set phrases with which she had determined to end his wooing, but the words would not form themselves on her lips.

Then, as if at a great distance, she heard a door close, and with a shock of fright she broke away from him.

"Ralph is coming!" she gasped.

She ran a few steps, and stopped when she heard Doctor Webster's step at the threshold. He came into the room and nodded in a friendly way at Jack, saying:

"The judge is waiting for you with the car."

But Jack was not ready to be dismissed. Standing before him was the girl he wanted, and the man who had a claim on her. The bond between them, he believed, was only that of a few words, a promise which could be denied; and the sense of his power to break it was strong within him. His athlete's instinct of combat was aroused, and with it was the athlete's ruthless determination to win.

"Doctor," he remarked crisply, "I've got to speak to you about Ruth."

Ruth had not believed he would carry out his threat, and his words brought a stifled cry of terror to her lips.

"No! No! Wait!" she called out, hurrying toward him, her hand raised to hush him.

Jack paid no attention to her. He continued:

"I love her, and you might as well know it."

Doctor Webster shrugged his shoulders as if in deprecation of a boyish absurdity.

"And what's more, she loves me!" Jack added excitedly. "She feels pledged to you, but I want to know if you——"

The doctor checked the question with a gesture. Jack had imagined that the crisis would come in an angry argument, but he had not reckoned upon his rival's self-possession. A little pale, inwardly raging at this challenge to his right in the girl he loved, but outwardly calm, Doctor Webster said quietly:

"I understand. Ruth will give you her answer to-morrow."

He took Jack by the arm in a masterful way, and added:

"You must not keep Judge White waiting."

Jack rose to his feet with the doctor's help, picked up his sweater, and limped toward the door. He was no longer so certain of victory, and his manner was half-apologetic when he remarked:

"Doctor, I'm sorry about this, but love like ours——"

"We will not discuss that point. Ruth shall choose between us."

"Then let her choose now," Jack demanded aggressively. He looked at Ruth for approval, but she did not seem to hear him.

"No," was the doctor's stern ultimatum. "You have had full sway for weeks. I demand my chance."

At the door Jack looked back again at Ruth, for some sign of encouragement or a gesture of good-by, but his silent appeal was unanswered. Then he turned and hobbled out, and presently a cheery shout of farewell was heard from Judge White, as the automobile started away.

Doctor Webster closed the door upon Bowling, and turned toward Ruth in perplexity. She had not confirmed Jack's assertion by words, but her silence, he knew, was eloquent of assent. He felt hurt and humiliated, but as he saw her standing there, very girlish, very troubled at heart, trying to avoid his questioning gaze, his mood changed. Never more than now had she seemed to need his tenderness, his chivalry, his unselfish advice.

"Ruth, dear," he said softly, "I want you to be happy."

Her eyes grew dim with tears.

"I know you do, Ralph," she answered, with a

little sob. "I wish I had never seen him. You and I would have been happy if he hadn't come. I don't know what it is,—but he casts a spell over me. I can't explain it. Oh, I'm so miserable!"

Then she began to cry in earnest.

Doctor Webster sat down beside her, and took her hand. He knew what "it" was;—she was in love—but not with him. The thought cut him to the heart.

"I'm sure we would have been happy," he said, with a sad attempt to conceal his pain. "My vision of the future has been a happy home with you. But, my dear little girl, I mustn't be selfish,—so if you love this boy, and it will make you happy, I'll try to step aside."

She dried her eyes, and turned to him anxiously.

"You've always been my best friend," she said earnestly.

"Yes, and I always will be. No matter what you decide, or what happens. If you ever need a friend, come to me, or send for me. I'll do anything for you."

"Help me now!" she demanded. "Tell me what I ought to do!"

She placed the decision of her life in his hands, as simply and candidly as if she were a child coming to her father for counsel. It was a great gift, as great as love itself, but its very generosity, its filial quality, stood between Doctor Webster and his heart's desire. He wanted to crush her in his arms and cover her face with kisses, but his sense of responsibility kept repeating the question: "What *ought* she to do?"

Then he knew that duty is a terrible god to worship.

He felt his way toward an answer, toward what he could be certain was the right answer. But he was of the philosophic temperament, and the philosopher, when confronted with life, is never certain of the right answer, because he knows that life is inscrutable. He said at last:

"I can only urge you to be sure you love him. I wish I knew how to help you. I wish I knew how to advise you. I'd give every hour of my life to

know the best thing to do, and to be able to guide you along the right path—the path that leads to happiness—happiness for you.”

He had given the right of decision back to her, telling her only to seek happiness. But where was happiness? she asked herself. Was it in the magic of a young man's voice, whispering of strange desires, and the lure of his eyes, evoking delirious needs, or——

She rose, and walked away from him, absorbed in a struggle with a baffling problem. He spoke to her again, but she did not answer, so he went out quietly, wondering what she was thinking.

CHAPTER IX

AN INTERRUPTED RENDEZVOUS

DOCTOR WEBSTER thought he was leaving Ruth alone with her thoughts, but he was wrong. He merely left her alone with her emotions. She had tried to struggle with her problem intellectually, but she had failed. It was not to be dealt with that way. She had ceased to think, and was only feeling with all the intensity of her young heart. What more could be expected from a girl of twenty, entranced and bewildered by her first love?

She was in love with Jack Bowling.

Until that day she had deceived herself successfully. Her delight in his companionship she had put down as friendship; her joy in his strength, his vigor, his radiant youth, she had attributed to the zeal of the artist in her subject. She had looked forward to the return of Doctor Webster with confidence that she would marry him and be happy ever

afterward, according to the conventional idea of marriage, and the fact that this expectation left her cold and cheerless, and did not stir her pulse to a single extra beat, had never impressed her as unusual. She knew that she ought to love Ralph Webster, and she thought she did love him. Then came the sudden wooing of the younger man, endearments that melted her heart with a new ecstasy, caresses that she yearned to answer in kind, and the world seemed to change for her, somehow.

The man to whom she had promised herself, who had a claim on her to which, if asserted, she would have yielded, had counseled the search for happiness—her own happiness.

When he said that, he was thinking in the terms of a life-time, but she, in her inexperience, took it to mean the happiness of the moment. Middle-age may be a Stoic, but youth is certain to be Epicurean.

But Ruth was not applying any philosophy of life or conduct to the matter. She was acting by instinct. She was a girl in love, to whom her lover

was calling. That way—toward him—was the way to happiness.

The afternoon passed with leaden hours for her. She took up her brushes and tried to occupy herself by working at the portrait of Jack, but her art-sense seemed to have left her. She felt as if she would never be able to complete the picture, and wondered at this feeling until she suddenly realized what influence stood between her and the canvas. It was the need of Jack himself; his buoyant comradeship, his stimulating gaiety. She could hardly visualize his face with the painter's imagination; the picture seemed to fade away into a mist, from which she yearned for the man himself to step out, laughing and alive—wonderfully alive. What few strokes she added were clumsy; they marred the picture. Presently she threw down her brushes and palette, out of patience with art.

Then Mrs. Franklin came to her with a story of bad news.

"My daughter," she said tearfully, "my little girl, has been taken sick at the place where she worked.

She's a waitress, you know. A boy just brought me word. They've sent her home, and there's no one to take care of her but me, and I don't know what to do."

Ruth tried to comfort the worried old lady, who was very dear to her.

"Why, go to your daughter, of course. Why shouldn't you?"

"But I can't leave you by yourself."

"Nonsense! Of course you can, you poor dear. Or I'll go with you, if I can be of any help."

"That isn't necessary," said Mrs. Franklin gratefully. "I can look after her all right."

"Well, run along," Ruth urged, "and I'll have Doctor Webster prescribe for her, if it's serious."

So Mrs. Franklin hurried away, almost forgetting her bonnet in her anxiety.

Ruth mused over the poor old soul's trouble a while, but then, as twilight crept on, she became oppressed with loneliness. She wondered what Jack was doing; if he was missing her as she was missing him, and so on—the usual reveries of young love.

She worried about his injured ankle. Then, too, came the desire to tell him what she had decided, that she had thrown her lot with happiness and against duty. She hoped he would come to see her, or call her on the telephone—he had done that several times before; but the twilight deepened, her loneliness increased, and no message came.

Suddenly she decided she would telephone to him. It was the first time she had ever called him up, and her fingers trembled with the thrill of a new adventure as she thumbed the telephone directory. The University? No, she could never get him there; classes were over for the day. The gymnasium? He wouldn't be there at this hour, but Freddie Donlin would be, and could tell her where Jack was. She considered for a moment, and then decided against consultation with Freddie. His home? Not likely; Jack was living on the campus. His fraternity house? Yes; that was the most likely place.

But as if in answer to her thoughts the telephone bell began to ring before she touched the receiver.

She answered with a thrill of delight, and was not disappointed. Jack was on the wire.

As soon as Ruth heard his voice, her loneliness seemed to vanish. She asked about his ankle, and rejoiced to learn that it was better. Then he asked earnestly:

"Can I come over? I want to see you so much."

She hesitated, and then answered:

"It's getting rather late, Jack."

"But I must see you this evening," he urged. "Have your callers gone?"

"Yes."

"That's good. May I come? Don't you want to see me?"

"Of course I want to see you, Jack, and of course you may come. When shall I expect you?"

"In about a quarter of an hour."

He closed the conversation with a "Good-by, dear," that left her with flushed cheeks and shining eyes. He cared for her as much as he said he did,—she was sure of it. And in a little while she'd be engaged to him instead of to Doctor Webster—she'd

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be Jack Bowling's promised girl and future wife. The thought was almost like an intoxicant.

She waited in tremulous anticipation, staring at a little clock that ticked the minutes away with exasperating slowness. After the chatter and the excitement of the afternoon, her studio room seemed very deserted and dreary now. She had never felt so much alone before.

Suddenly she remembered that Mrs. Franklin was not puttering around the kitchen as she was wont to do at that hour, busy over preparations for their simple dinner. In her excitement she had forgotten about the sick daughter and Mrs. Franklin's indefinite leave of absence when she talked with Jack over the telephone, and now she wondered if she had not been indiscreet in permitting him to call. Her mother, certainly, would not approve of such an unchaperoned meeting as she had unconsciously arranged. Della, however, accustomed to all manner of short cuts across the conventionalities, would think nothing of it at all. She considered the matter from these different points of view, and grew trou-

bled. She was too young in the studio life, too close to her school days and her mother's careful guardianship, not to feel twinges of conscience. At last she started up to telephone Jack again, to tell him he couldn't come after all; but she was stopped by the purr of a motor outside, and then a ring at the bell. Her heart leaped happily and her worries were swallowed up in a surge of joy. That was Jack now! He must have come over in some one's car.

She hurried to the door, but when she opened it, who should bounce in upon her but the altogether unexpected Della?

That young lady had recovered her good spirits, which had been ruffled at her departure; she was, in fact, more breezy and jaunty than ever. Her manner was in marked contrast to that of Ruth, who had been taken so completely by surprise that her greeting was a little inhospitable. Della's sudden re-appearance came as a shock to her. If there was any one she had not wanted to see at that particular moment, it was this self-same Della.

Judge White, it seemed, was responsible for Della's return. Instead of taking her home in his car, after depositing Jack at the gymnasium, as had been the plan, he had suggested a decorous joy-ride through Central Park and up Riverside Drive, and Della had accepted with alacrity. They had been motor-cruising around for several hours, and on the return trip Della had decided to drop off at Ruth's studio again, for a chat over the day's events. Della explained all this buoyantly.

"I wanted to tell you something exciting," she added gaily.

Ruth was in a monosyllabic condition; she merely asked "What?" without manifesting much interest.

"I don't believe I love Jack Bowling any more. Isn't that splendid?"

Something in her tone, a spirit of more earnest happiness than Della usually displayed, aroused Ruth's interest. In love herself, she intuitively sensed romance in Della's jubilation, and thought the judge had something to do with it. She asked eager little questions, to which Della gave laughing,

significant little answers. Ruth imagined that it might even have come to a proposal.

"Did he—did he say anything?" she demanded.

"No, he didn't have to," Della answered flippantly. "He looked. A man can look a whole volume while he is cranking a machine."

Well, it seemed as if there was no cause for congratulations yet; Della had merely started another flirtation; so Ruth dropped the judge out of the conversation, and turned to some one of more importance to her.

"So you don't love Mr. Bowling any more?" she remarked quietly. She couldn't help letting a little ring of triumph creep into her voice, because what did it matter if Della had cared for him? Jack was hers now, and Della's prior claim (which she had never regarded as important) was overruled.

"Oh, let's not talk about him," said Della with a little irritation. "I feel as if I had just waked up out of a trance."

"And you're glad?"

"Of course I'm glad, my dear. If there's one

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thing I value above all others in a woman, it's the ability to keep her head on her shoulders. I had lost mine over Jack Bowling, I must confess, but I've got it back now, and the rest of me has been shaking hands with it ever since."

This discussion of Jack brought the color up into Ruth's cheeks. She knew that Della was also saying in her heart, "You're a silly little goose to have lost your own head over him," and she resented it.

She was proud of being in love with Jack; she didn't care if Della knew it, and she wanted to stand up and say sharply, "Yes, I care for him, and he cares for me, and you're jealous." But she was a little afraid of Della's sarcasm, and hoped she would go before Jack came.

"What wonderful color you have, child," Della remarked, as she looked at Ruth closely. "Is it real?"

She pinched Ruth's cheek playfully.

"It is! How in the world do you manage it?"

Ruth's nerves were beginning to rebel under the strain.

"It's unnatural—I mean I don't usually have it," she answered petulantly. "Now, stop laughing! It isn't paint. It's temperament."

"Or temperature," Della added. "You're excited."

Ruth said she wasn't, but admitted that she might be a little feverish. Then she tried to change the subject.

"Do you like the picture?"

"Yes," said Della, without enthusiasm, "but I'm not as interested in it as I once was. I think I'll pay you and have the picture taken away to-morrow."

This seemed to alarm Ruth.

"Please don't!" she entreated. "Not until it is finished."

"As long as you get the money, and I'm satisfied," asked Della, "what difference does it make?"

"I can't afford to have my work criticized unfavorably," Ruth answered.

"But you don't expect me to hang it in the Hall of Fame, or donate it to the Metropolitan Museum, do you?"

Ruth resented Della's ironic tone.

"Perhaps you would prefer to cancel the order?" she asked, with an edge of temper in her voice.

"And leave it here?" cooed Della. "My dear child, I have too much consideration for your health to do that. Just look at your cheeks!"

"You may tease me all you choose," Ruth retorted crossly, going to the window and peering out.

"You should consult a doctor," Della advised. "You're almost hysterical."

"I'm looking for him now."

That was a deliberate fib, but she was too vexed and fretted to be scrupulous. She hoped Della would believe she was waiting for Doctor Webster, and would have the tact to accept the hint that a third in the group would make it a crowd.

Just then the door-bell rang, and Ruth's shock of embarrassment at the sound betrayed her. She was going to be caught as a deliberate "story-teller," and not being skilled in the gentle art of evading the truth she stood aghast at the humiliating prospect.

"Is it Doctor Webster you are expecting?" Della demanded suspiciously.

Ruth lost control of herself and the situation. She nervously insisted that she was expecting Doctor Webster, being too panic-stricken to evade Della's cross-examination.

"I thought I recognized his ring," Della remarked mischievously.

"Won't you excuse me, Della?" Ruth asked plaintively.

"I'm sorry you're feeling so badly," said Della, as she made leisurely preparations to go. "Did you telephone the doctor to come?"

Ruth stubbornly insisted that she had done so.

Della heard foot-steps in the hall outside; exclaimed "He's here!" and scampered over toward the door to listen.

"That's strange," she added quizzically, watching Ruth closely. "It sounds very much like Jack's step."

"Does it?" Ruth exclaimed. She gave a little

cry of alarm, and tottered as if she were going to faint.

Amazed at this betrayal of unstrung nerves, and deeply concerned, Della ran to her with sisterly sympathy, and led her to the lounge. Then she went to the door and opened it, and called out: "Come in, doctor!"

To the astonishment of both of them, Doctor Webster himself entered. His presence apparently confirmed Ruth's statements, and left Della gasping. She had been certain that Ruth was fibbing.

The two girls were so obviously bewildered that the doctor wanted to know what was the matter.

"Oh, Ralph, I'm so glad you came!" Ruth murmured.

"Are you ill?" he asked anxiously.

"I don't know.—That's why I telephoned you."

"Then you *did* send for him?" Della exclaimed, with an emphasis which revealed her lack of credulity. Doctor Webster sensed the situation from her remark and Ruth's speechless distress. He tactfully answered Della himself:

"You seem to doubt it, Miss Forbush?"

That adroit confirmation of Ruth's story, to which the doctor's sense of chivalry had prompted him, baffled Della, who began to sputter vaguely, explaining that she had thought—well, nothing, but she was a little surprised, that was all.

"I see you are surprised," said the doctor, with a smile. "You told me to come in before you opened the door,—and yet you were astonished when I entered."

"I was expecting another doctor," Della declared sheepishly.

"I told you it was Doctor Webster," said Ruth sharply. "How could you have expected another doctor?"

That finished Della's investigation and ended her visit. She covered her retreat with confused remarks of the conventional kind, and said her good-bys, but she was so flustered that she would have gone out through the wrong door if Doctor Webster had not jovially called her attention to the error of her ways.

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When Della had finally escaped, the doctor turned toward Ruth.

"You were not expecting me," he said coldly.

"No," she admitted. "She was so inquisitive I had to tell her something."

"So you told her you had telephoned me. And when you heard me coming, you both thought it was Mr. Bowling."

She feebly granted that this was the truth of the matter.

"Ruth, since you have known Mr. Bowling," he asked earnestly, "have you ever taken half an hour to sit down and think of what you are doing? Have you asked yourself, 'Is it love or infatuation that I feel for this boy?' "

But Ruth was in no mood to undergo another cross-examination. Della had caught her in a trap and teased her cruelly, and though she was grateful to Doctor Webster for having come to her rescue, she rebelled against the paternal way in which he started to lecture her.

"Please don't!" she exclaimed obstinately. "I want you to be my friend, Ralph, and you said you

would; but I can't discuss Mr. Bowling with you now."

"I cannot believe that you love him," the doctor said firmly.

"Whatever it is," she declared, "it is like a spell. It's irresistible. I've told you that already."

"You are making a mistake," he said bluntly, "to allow any man to dominate your soul through your senses."

She flushed angrily and begged him to stop.

"Every word you say," she declared, "is making me stubborn—stubborn and hard!"

"Ruth, you need help now," he answered tenderly. "You must be protected."

And he repeated his charge:—she was falling under the domination of sense.

"I feel you are hampering me, binding me," she said in a flash of temper.

"I wish to save you."

"You come with advice—warning," she protested rebelliously.

"For your own good, Ruth."

"I can't see it that way. I only know that

I am dominated by a feeling stronger than I am."

This frank confession of her infatuation hurt him deeply. He turned away from her, and sat down at a desk, bowing his head on his hands, with the sense of defeat heavy upon him.

"You see how strong it is," she continued more gently. "It makes me cruel when I wish to be kind."

"Think of your mother, and what she would say to all this," he urged. "She should know about it. Why don't you write to her? Why don't you ask her advice?"

"She never met Jack," said Ruth, hurriedly bringing up arguments against the stand she knew her mother would be certain to take. "She never saw him. She never felt his magnetism."

"The magnetism of youth," echoed the doctor ironically.

"Well, if it is youth, it is more than anything else in the world to me!"

"Write her that," he demanded. "She is a woman who has known love;—she will understand the significance of love like that. She must know the truth. Write her now, please."

She hesitated, and then took the chair at the desk as he offered it to her. He placed paper and pen before her.

"What shall I say?" she asked with embarrassment.

"Just what you said to me."

"I can't collect my thoughts. Tell me what to say."

"Will you agree to write and send what I dictate?"

She assented, and he began:

"'Doctor Webster has insisted that I tell you the truth. While he was with you in California, I met another man'—Write his name.—'I have been painting a portrait of him. I have transferred my love to him. He is young—an athlete—I love him. He is more than everything else in the world to me.'"

Ruth's pen balked at the last sentence.

"I can't write that," she declared.

"Yet you say it is true," he reminded her.

"But it sounds so—so silly!"

"You didn't feel silly when you said it to me, did you?"

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But Ruth dropped the pen and walked away from the desk, insisting that she could not and would not write that sentence.

"Then I shall have to send an unfinished letter," the doctor said, as he picked up the sheet of paper and began to fold it.

"Ralph, don't send that letter," she begged in frightened tones. "Mother will know something is wrong."

"Wrong?" the doctor exclaimed. "Of course she will!"

She started to implore, and caught at his hand as he put the letter into his pocket.

He looked at her sternly and said:

"You have humiliated me. Do you also expect me to stand as an object of contempt before your mother? The trust she has placed in me is too sacred for that. You must tell her the truth. You must justify me in her regard, or you will forfeit all claim on my friendship. Let me keep *her* affection, at least."

"I'll write her to-night," Ruth promised contritely, for now she began to understand how bitterly

she had wounded this man, before whom she felt like an insignificant girl. "I'll tell her the truth."

"Very well," he replied, and gave her back the letter. Without another word he started to go. The grimness of suffering in his face caused her to catch at his hand as he passed her.

"It hurts me to see you look so," she said affectionately. "Please don't be angry with me."

He wished her a curt good-night, and went out. As she stood at the door, she heard voices in the vestibule. A cheery, almost flippant greeting,—that was Jack Bowling;—a gruff acknowledgment,—that was the doctor's response. As she listened and waited, it seemed as if every nerve in her body had become a vibrating wire.

Then Jack entered, dressed in his gay collegiate best. A slight limp was the only evidence of the afternoon's mishap. He strode toward Ruth blithely, reckless of consequences to his injured ankle. Then came a step at the threshold, and he stopped short. The doctor had returned.

CHAPTER X

CHILDREN OF NATURE

DOCTOR WEBSTER'S action in following Jack Bowling back into the studio had been almost instinctive. He had been prompted not by jealousy, but a sense of some danger, some unhappiness, which was threatening the girl he loved, and he had returned to protect her from it if he could. His young rival stared at him impudently as he entered, but he passed by him as if unconscious of his existence, and went straight to Ruth.

She seemed to him on the verge of hysteria, and indeed, the dread of a quarrel between the two men had almost unnerved her for a moment. He expressed concern for her condition, but she answered that she was all right, and asked to be excused.

"I shall not leave you like this," he answered.

Jack broke out in an impertinent protest at the intrusion, but Ruth silenced him with a word.

"If your mother were here to protect you," the doctor continued coldly, "I would go out that door and never return,—but I know the danger."

"She has made her choice," Jack observed, with an insolent smile.

"Not yet," he answered. "She still wears my ring."

Without a word, Ruth started to take off her engagement ring.

"Don't decide now, Ruth, please," the doctor urged her. "Your life, your happiness, your whole future is at stake. No! No!"

He cried out as if in physical pain, but Ruth did not heed him. She tugged at the ring fiercely until it came off, and then thrust it into his hand, saying abruptly:

"Take it. I cannot marry you."

Doctor Webster looked at the sparkling symbol of his betrothal, as it lay in the palm of his hand, like a man in a daze, and then dropped his head in despair.

"So this is the end," he finally said. "You will write to your mother?"

"Yes."

"I may depend upon you?"

"Of course."

"Very well." He closed his hand over the ring as if trying to crush it in his grasp, turned on his heel and left the room.

Ruth waited until she heard the street door close upon the man whom she had promised to marry and cast off. A realization of the pain she had given in return to his loving kindness came to her, but that qualm of remorse was short-lived. She had recovered her freedom, and could follow where her heart led her. She was a little sorry for him, but she was greatly glad for herself.

When she turned back toward Jack, she saw upon her desk the unfinished letter that he had dictated. She had promised to complete it and send it, but in an instant she absolved herself from that promise, as from the last bond of an obligation which she had

thrown off. She picked up the letter, and deliberately tore it into little pieces.

Jack was watching her closely. There was such an air of decision and finality in her destruction of the letter that his boy's heart became a little troubled. He came close to her and asked earnestly:

"Ruth, are you sure——?"

She did not let him finish the question. She suddenly faced him and put her hands on his shoulders. She was weary of doubts and scruples and self-analysis; now she only wanted the comradeship of the man she loved.

"Let's not talk about that," she said softly.

He looked into her eyes, found love there, and suddenly turned away from her. She was infinitely sweet and provocative; without warning, he found himself struggling against desire.

She was hurt by his apparent coldness, and asked anxiously:

"What's the matter, Jack?"

In answer he caught her in his arms, held her

close for a moment, and then kissed her impulsively, but only on the cheek.

"Oh, you're glorious!" he cried. "That's what's the matter."

Then he released her again, as if angry with himself. His heart was pounding as if he were running a race; his cheeks were flushed and burning.

"What's wrong?" she asked wistfully, innocently. "Don't you love me?"

"Love you? I've lost my head completely over you!" he said fiercely.

He put his hands on her shoulders, standing away from her at arms' length, and then let his fingers slip down her arms to her finger-tips, in a long, subtle caress. She looked into his eyes wonderingly, fascinated and perplexed by the light that she saw in them.

Then he released her hands, turned away from her, and went to get his hat, as if determined to go. She watched him blankly, hurt that he should leave her so abruptly. He stopped at the door to say good-by.

She did not understand why he should want to go; she thought it meant that, after all, he did not love her.

She cried out his name weakly, and then a mist seemed to fill the room. She grew faint, and swayed uncertainly, but before she could fall she was in his arms again.

"Ruth! My own Ruth!" he whispered to her. "I can't give you up! I can't!"

She felt his lips on hers, and her faintness passed away. A new life of happiness and content surged through her.

"No, don't," she answered softly. "I couldn't bear it."

He was almost crushing her in his arms.

"It's got me—got me mad!" he murmured.

"And me!"

"It makes me forget everything else in the world but you!"

"Do you love me as much as that?"

"More than anything else. I'll never let you go!"



"YOU BELONG TO ME! WE BELONG TO EACH OTHER!"

You belong to me! We belong to each other! Tell me you love me!"

She was limp now, and incoherent.

"I must love you," she sighed.

A great current seemed to be sweeping Ruth out into some unknown sea, and she knew its irresistible embrace was Jack's arms.—A mighty storm seemed to be beating down upon her face, and she knew its rain was his kisses.—An enchanted forest seemed to be on fire, and the flames, which brought a mad, leaping rapture as they seethed around her, were Jack also.

She thought she had been carried a long, long way by the current, through the storm, into the fire. Finally she opened her eyes, and saw she was in her bed-room, not alone.

Then, it seemed, some girl who was not herself, a girl who had been Ruth Stanley, but who had changed mysteriously into an ugly, sordid thing, hid her face in a pillow and began to weep.

CHAPTER XI

IN THE DOCTOR'S OFFICE

DOCTOR WEBSTER went on with his work as before, healing the sick and ministering to the injured. He gave no sign to the world of the hurt he carried within him—the stab to the heart he had felt when Ruth Stanley had given him back his ring. It was a grievous wound, and its pain was severe, but he hid his suffering, and fought his soul-bitterness with longer hours in the hospital clinics and closer attention to his charity cases.

The greatest hope of his life had gone to wreck, and there was little chance of his replacing it with another and happier romance, for his was not one of those flexible temperaments that find easy consolation, but he did not make himself miserable by brooding over that aspect of the episode. He merely went on working, and strove, with all the strength of his disciplined will, to keep memories of Ruth out of

his mind. That, of course, was a bitter and a losing struggle. He could not forget her.

After that day he neither saw her, nor wrote her, nor telephoned her. The temptation to seek her out and renew his arguments was great, but his pride would not permit him to yield to it. He heard of her occasionally, of course, usually through Della, who invited him to a family dinner now and then, or through Mrs. Franklin, who often called at his office to consult with him about her sick daughter, whose break-down had brought on a period of invalidism. But he was never the first to mention her, and he guessed, from their painful attempts at tact and their solicitous manner toward him, that they knew he had been jilted.

His assistant, a young man fresh from his hospital interneship, and some of his professional intimates and club friends, also adopted a comforting attitude, which failed of its kindly intention, and often, indeed, had the opposite effect of irritating him into moods of silent rage. There is probably no more unhappy man than the one who has been unsuccessful.

ful in love and whose friends are trying to be "nice" to him on account of it.

News of Jack Bowling often came to Doctor Webster's attention. The sporting pages of the newspapers contained daily reports of that athlete's increasing fitness to run the Marathon at the Olympian games, and pictures of the young man, in the costume that Ruth had tried to immortalize on canvas, often garnished these accounts. Freddie Donlin, too, brought the gossip of the campus, for he had developed a habit of calling on the doctor in search of free medical advice, for the benefit of his charges. Whenever one of the team got a sore toe, Freddie was likely to rush to Doctor Webster for a prescription, and he was always received kindly. Freddie could throw an acquaintance into the high speed of friendship with surprising celerity. At his second visit, he slapped Doctor Webster on the back, and at the third, he started calling him "old pal."

Doctor Webster looked forward, with something like dread, to a letter from Ruth's mother as an

aftermath to the broken engagement. Weeks passed; the expected letter did not come, and he wondered why. If Ruth had kept her promise, her mother already knew of her change of heart, and would certainly have had something to say about it, probably something distressing. His sense of duty prompted him to write or wire her, but after he had thought it over carefully, he decided that Mrs. Stanley's silence was due to a reluctance to rub salt in his own wounds, and so he put that phase of the matter out of his mind.

One Saturday afternoon in June, almost two months after that day when Ruth Stanley had made her decision, Doctor Webster was ending a busy day in his office. He had a handsome suite in one of the sky-scrapers that have made New York's sky-line a new wonder of the world, and from his windows he could look out over the Hudson River, across which the ferries moved like shuttles to and from the Jersey side, and down which, now and then, an ocean liner started with slow majesty on its trans-Atlantic voyage. Many who had come to see this

physician, soul-sick rather than body-sick, had found comfort and inspiration in that noble view over the island-metropolis. Doctor Webster himself was wont to assert, in jest, that a glance out of his window was a specific for melancholia.

Mrs. Franklin had come in to report on her daughter's condition, and the doctor was writing a prescription to meet certain new symptoms she had described, when the assistant announced the reappearance of Mr. Donlin, and was told to show him in. Freddie sauntered into the office gorgeously attired in an outing suit. He looked as if he were prepared to be first-aid at an open-air wedding, or vice-admiral of a stylish clam-bake, and Doctor Webster, accustomed to the young man's ruder manifestations in an old sweater and gymnasium flannels, could not refrain from smiling at his absurdly jaunty aspect.

"Hello, Doc!" was Freddie's breezy greeting. Then he observed Mrs. Franklin, and gave her a cordial nod. "I'm all ready for the big get-away," he ran on. "The operation was a complete success."

"Operation?" asked the doctor.

"Painless removal of my bank-roll by the tailor. He must have given me twilight sleep. How's the fit?"

"Fit!" Mrs. Franklin exclaimed anxiously. "I hope he isn't going to have one here."

Doctor Webster paid Freddie's clothes the expected compliment, and the latter continued:

"When you're at leisure, I'd like your advice on a little matter. We're sailing at four on the *Minnehaha*, you know."

The doctor told Freddie to sit down and wait a few minutes, and tossed him a newspaper for company.

"Here's the afternoon paper. Quite a fine picture there of your friend Mr. Bowling."

"Gee, that's a pippin," Freddie remarked, as he studied a three-column half-tone of America's Marathon runner. "I must get a copy for Jack."

"You may have that one."

"Thank you a cent's worth," answered the campus comedian.

Then Doctor Webster gave Mrs. Franklin the prescription and told her how to administer the medicine.

"I'm so absent-minded," the old lady said anxiously, "but I'll try to remember."

"You must. Her life depends upon it. The directions will be on the bottle."

She tried to read the prescription, but couldn't, and fussed around in her ancient hand-bag, trying to find her spectacles, until the doctor called her attention to the fact that they were pushed up on her forehead. Freddie laughed so heartily at her plight that she scowled at him and muttered to the doctor:

"I hope he isn't going to have one of those fits."

"Oh, no," he assured her. "If he does, I'll take care of him."

She finally went out, after one false start caused by her forgetting to take the prescription with her. Then the doctor turned his undivided attention to the jovial Mr. Donlin, who offered to bet him that Mrs. Franklin would forget the number of her house before she got home.

"So you're off for the Olympian games?" he asked.

As a matter of fact, he had forgotten that this was the day the American team of athletes were to sail for Stockholm, and now, having been reminded of it by Freddie, he was wondering if Jack Bowling would accompany them.

"Yes. I wish you were going along," chattered Freddie. "About fifty of the university boys are going with the team. I just left Captain Winters and Charles Langdon Stowe, the sporting writer, at the University Club. They were speaking of you. They were in your class, weren't they?"

"Yes, I remember them well. Fine fellows, both of them. Are they going with you?"

"You bet. They're backing Jack Bowling for the Marathon."

"Is Bowling in good form?" the doctor inquired casually, to mask his distaste for that phase of the topic.

"Best ever. He'll win in a walk," Freddie asserted. "I left him at the gym. The bunch is up there looking him over. He'll win, don't worry

about that. And I have a hunch he's going to hang up a new Marathon record."

"Then he will be the great American hero for a week or two," Doctor Webster remarked, "and you, Freddie, will shine in his reflected glory."

During this conversation Freddie had been prowling around the office, inspecting its furnishings with irresponsible curiosity. He paused before an unusual bit of decoration—a framed piece of parchment, hand-lettered and illuminated in the style of medieval monkish missals. He studied it over carefully, and then took it off the wall.

"What's this you have framed, Doc?" he asked. "At first I thought it was the Declaration of Independence, but now I see it has something to do with the medical profession."

"That is the oath of Hippocrates, Mr. Donlin," the doctor answered gravely.

"I thought I knew all about oaths, but this is a new one on me. Who was old Hippo-what-you-may-call-it, and why the oath?" Freddie demanded, as he read the document over again.

"Hippocrates was the most celebrated physician

of antiquity. That oath was written by him. It binds all who practice the art of healing in the most rigorous bonds of honor and brotherhood. Hippocrates urges the sacredness of the physician's trust."

Freddie studied over a certain line in the oath with knitted brows, then he asked sceptically:

"And do you keep it?"

"We are supposed to," the doctor answered, "but you must remember there is no profession wholly free from dishonesty, not even that of a trainer, probably, eh?"

Freddie grinned at the doctor's joke, and retorted that being a trainer wasn't a profession, but only a bad habit.

"But the physician," Doctor Webster continued seriously, "participates in the closest and most sacred relations of life. He should, therefore, be a man of sterling integrity."

"I see," Freddie remarked, replacing the oath. "I'd never given the matter much thought, but now I have a bigger idea of the medical profession than I had before. That's some Oath!"

"I regret to say there are men who have taken that Oath who should be in a chain gang."

"I suppose so," Freddie admitted.

"Most doctors, however, regard that document with reverence, and keep their oath to practise medicine and surgery as gentlemen, shunning all malpractice and holding inviolate the secrets of their patients."

"Secrets? Do you do that? Do you honestly keep your patients' secrets?" Freddie asked with sudden interest.

"I try to, certainly. If it was a matter that might injure my patient, I should feel bound to keep it."

"Fine! Well, then, consider me your patient! Here's a retainer!"

Freddie tried to thrust a five-dollar bill into the doctor's hand, which the latter refused smilingly, protesting that he was not a lawyer. Then Freddie excitedly told what was on his mind:—he had been boasting to his athletes that he was a thorough seadog, immune to the peril of *mal de mer*, and had wagered one of them a supper for the crowd at the Cecil in London that he would outlast him, in case

of a rough voyage. So he wanted the doctor to give him something to prevent his stomach from rebelling when the waves began to roll.

"Something to prevent sea-sickness?" mused the doctor, smiling at the eternal boyishness of the college type. He picked up a book from the reading table, and handed it to Freddie, saying:

"Here is a little volume called 'An Essay on Silence.' It sets forth more comprehensively than I can all that medical science has been able to discover about the prevention of sea-sickness. Read it carefully."

Freddie thanked him, and opened the book. He looked perplexed, and then turned over page after page, with growing dismay.

"See here!" he exclaimed. "All the pages here are blank."

"Exactly!" the doctor answered, enjoying his joke. "On the subject of sea-sickness, all pages are blank."

Freddie's face became as blank as the "Essay on Silence."

"You're so encouraging, Doc! Then there's no hope for me? You don't know of a thing?"

"Not a thing that will prevent sea-sickness," the doctor answered, as he began to write on a prescription pad.

"I thought you doctors knew everything," Freddie lamented, as he threw the book back on the table. "You've been kidding me!"

"While we are unable to prevent sea-sickness, we are sometimes able to cure it," the doctor continued, handing him a prescription. "Have this filled before you go aboard. Follow the directions and I think you'll arrive safely."

Freddie grasped the prescription eagerly, and gloom fled from his brow.

"You had this up your sleeve all the time!" he exclaimed gaily. "Doc, you're getting to be quite a comedian!"

"Remember, I've given you a remedy, not a preventive. However, it might prove to be both."

"Thanks! How much do I owe you?"

"Oh, come and see me when you get back, and tell me how it worked."

Freddie was expressing his thanks, preliminary to departure, when Mrs. Franklin, who should have been half way home by that time, came rustling in again. Office hours had ended, and the doctor's assistant had left for the day, at a nod of assent from his employer, when the interview with Freddie Donlin began. The old lady entered unannounced, with a "Doctor, I forgot——" of apology.

"She's in again," Freddie observed *sotto voce* to the doctor. "What did I tell you?"

Mrs. Franklin looked at Freddie knowingly and remarked: "So you didn't have a fit after all?"

She seemed a trifle disappointed about it. Freddie carefully reassured her on that point, explained that the word "fit" had referred to his costume, and not to his physical condition, and succeeded in making her see the joke. After chaffing her good-naturedly, he ruefully retrieved his new hat from the chair on which he had thrown it, and which had been occupied by Mrs. Franklin, smoothed the dents out of it, and said good-by to the doctor. The latter wished him a cordial *bon voyage*, gave him a warm grip of the hand, and sent him on his way.

There was something in that young man, a kind of amiable, care-free chuckle-headedness, which amused and cheered the doctor. Freddie's irrepressible "freshness" and sympathetic crudity made the doctor feel a little younger, a little less austere and lonely.

Then he asked Mrs. Franklin what she had come back for, and to save her life, she couldn't remember. Freddie's jollity had driven it out of her head. As a matter of fact, she had intended to ask him for a bill, and to offer to make a payment on account, but even if that good intention had not escaped from her enfeebled memory, her errand would have been fruitless. Several times before, Doctor Webster had told her to put her money back in her purse.

This time the doctor shook his head over her in despair. Obviously, her cares in nursing her daughter and her duties as housekeeper to Miss Stanley were getting to be too much for the old lady.

"Let me get a nurse for you," he suggested, "it won't cost you anything."

She began to thank him, but he sent her away

without much more ceremony. He was looking forward to a Saturday afternoon round of golf, and between Freddie Donlin and Mrs. Franklin he had already missed his usual train to the course.

He telephoned to a nurse's bureau, and left orders that a nurse should be sent to Mrs. Franklin's home as soon as possible, also that the bill should be sent to him.

While he was at the telephone, there was a light, timid knocking at the outer door of the office, and he sang out a cheery "Come in!" He paid no attention to the caller, however; in fact, he did not hear one enter. When he had finished telephoning, and hung up the receiver, he glanced toward the door, wondering what appointment for that afternoon he could have forgotten.

He saw, standing timidly at the threshold and hardly daring to enter, some one whom he had no reason at all to expect. It was Ruth Stanley.

There was a strange, imploring look in her eyes, a look of fright, of sadness and of entreaty.

CHAPTER XII

THE PENALTY

AFTER that evening when they had been left alone together in the studio, and when Nature, in her strongest and most mysterious mood, had caught them in ambush, Ruth, drenched with tears, had sent Jack Bowling away, crying that she never wanted to see him again. He had gone, with clumsy expressions of contrition, and she had stayed there in the dark for hours, utterly wretched, weeping her heart out.

She had seen him again, of course, for it seemed as if she had lost everything in the world except him. He besieged her with telephone calls the next day, and they met by appointment in the park, both of them shame-faced, trying to talk lightly of little things and avoiding the great matter that was in their minds. They took long walks together, nearly every day after that, seeking to win back the old,

happy friendship that had become submerged in something more significant and more somber. Once they had gone to a theater, without knowing what kind of a play they were to see. There was a foolish virgin in it, and a reckless lover, and—they became very unhappy and left after the second act.

He never came to see her at the studio again. He never asked if he might come in, and she never invited him. They knew now where the danger line was, and by tacit consent they avoided it. But sometimes, at night, in the lonesome hours before sleep came, she would yearn for him, and then, her cheeks warm with blushes, would begin to weep in self-abasement.

Often on their walks, when they were unobserved, she would slip her hand into his timidly, and hope for an answering caress of endearment and protection, but his response seemed casual. He would grow thoughtful and she melancholy. It seemed as if they had less and less to talk about, as the weeks passed on. They could not keep apart, and yet they acted as if they were boring each other.

Out of a clear sky, one afternoon, Ruth asked:

"Jack, when are we going to get married?"

"Well, I'm in training now," he answered slowly, "and I've got to go to Stockholm with the team in June;—and it will be a year before I get my degree, and——"

"I see," she said coldly. She never mentioned the topic again.

Except for these meetings with Jack, she kept to herself, pretending to work at her pictures when Mrs. Franklin was around, and sitting listlessly in her window-seat, dull and cheerless, when she was alone. Della telephoned her occasionally, but Ruth refused her invitations to parties and said she was too busy to be disturbed with callers. Della burst in upon her unannounced, several times, but was not received hospitably.

Ruth grew pale, and lost some of her prettiness, and Mrs. Franklin worried over her, saying she looked as if she were going to be ill. She herself came to believe this soon enough. She fainted twice,

for no particular reason, and had recurring attacks of physical wretchedness.

Soon Mrs. Franklin began to urge her to see a doctor, but she refused. She had learned enough of life to know, soon enough, what her symptoms meant. They were omens of motherhood.

The realization of this fact almost crushed her, physically and mentally. She spent two days in bed, prostrated by nervous shock; two days in which she felt as if she were going mad. Then, as her strength came back, she telephoned to Jack.

She went to meet him in the park, at their accustomed rendezvous, in a mood of strained, unnatural calmness. She did not know what was to be done, but she knew she must tell him, and she felt that he would take her in his arms and comfort her, and that then the nameless fear that was burning in her brain would somehow vanish.

They sat on a bench together, and she took his hand in both her own and pressed it tightly.

"Jack," she whispered, "something serious has happened. I'm sorry, but I've got to tell you."

Then she told him bluntly about her condition.

His head drooped, and he began to trace patterns in the gravel of the walk with the heel of his boot.

"Are you sure?"

"I am sure."

"It can't be true."

"It is true."

He groaned, an ugly little note of despair, and then ejaculated, as if talking to himself:

"Good God, what will my people say?"

She dropped his hand, which fell limply into her lap, and then jerked herself away from its touch. She arose then, without a word, and ran away from him swiftly, never looking back. She ran as if she were being pursued, panting deeply, fleeing as if for her life. When she reached her home he was still sitting there on the bench, wondering what his "people" would say.

CHAPTER XIII

THE OATH OF HIPPOCRATES

So Ruth had come back to the man who had loved her with the ideals of the heart rather than the lust of the flesh,—the man whose goodness she had rewarded with pain, whose kindness she had repaid with humiliation. She had dragged herself to him with much the same instinct that a wounded creature crawls toward its lair, dumbly, hopelessly striving to find shelter. It was like facing death for her to confide in him, but if he had not been at hand, she would have killed herself rather than tell her secret to any one else.

Doctor Webster tried to cover his surprise by greeting her casually and pleasantly.

“Ruth! Well!—I wasn’t expecting a visit from you! I was just about to close the office for the day. Come in, please, and sit down.”

She dropped into a chair by his desk, without a

word, and he continued affably and without any hint of the bitterness with which they had parted:

"Well, this is a surprise! It has been some time since I saw you. I thought you were so interested in college sports"—he referred to the head-lines in the newspapers on his desk—"that you would be at the dock to-day to see our all-American athletic team sail away. I see there are a lot of them going."

She looked up at him tragically, with a kind of mute protest against his attempt at flippancy.

"Ralph," she said, in a kind of monotone, "I'm—I'm in trouble."

His manner changed, although he did not catch her meaning.

"I'm sorry," he answered with sympathy. "Can I help you?"

"I hope so. You once said you would help me if I needed you. You're the only one in the world I dare confide in now."

"What of your mother?"

Ruth shuddered, and gave a little exclamation of protest.



"RALPH," SHE SAID, "I'M—I'M IN TROUBLE"

"I wouldn't have her know for all the world. No one must know. No one!"

He became alarmed at her tragic intensity, and took her hand to quiet her.

"Now tell me, dear," he said. "What has happened?"

"Can't you understand?" she groaned. "I'm in trouble!"

A sudden burst of tears re-enforced her confession, and he did not have to ask any more questions. He understood.

The stark, cruel fact that this girl whom he loved was facing illegitimate motherhood crushed its way into his consciousness like a brutal blow in the dark. He had built stately mansions of high, bright thoughts about her; he had cherished her as an innocent child and a lovely maiden; and these illusions, at her words, seemed to totter and fall in obscene ruin.

The idealist in him felt as if his most holy spiritual possession had suddenly been defiled. It was only with a slow, grim effort of the will that he

could force himself to face the situation as a man of science, by whom Nature, in her most devious ways, is understood and respected.

After his first unconscious outcry of protest, which cut Ruth like a whip-lash, he asked:

"When did this happen?"

"That night," she quavered, "when I gave you back your ring."

He groaned again, as if struggling under too heavy a burden, and then was silent.

"Is it—is it too late?" she whispered.

"No, I think not."

"You will help me?"

"Yes, I'll help you."

"I knew you would," she said, with a sigh of relief.

"How could you know that?" he asked sternly.

"How could you assume that I, who loved you and trusted you, would receive a confession like this with tolerance and pity?"

"To whom else could I go?" she whimpered.

"To your mother," he declared.

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She shook her head sadly.

"No? To your friends. No? You feared to lose their respect.—Yet you come to me, who must feel the humiliation as deeply as yourself. Did you think of that? No, you didn't consider my respect worth keeping."

His voice was harsh, his tone was bitter; and Ruth grew cold with fear.

"I have no right to ask your help," she admitted tearfully. "I'll go."

She rose and started toward the door with uncertain steps, but he halted her.

"Wait. You did ask me, and I promised to help you. Ruth—look at me! There are other doctors. Why did you come to me?"

"Because I knew you loved me," she faltered, "not as he did—because I had come to realize that you cared for my soul, my happiness of heart——"

He made her sit down again, and began to question her, but before he could find out what he wanted to learn—the arrangements between her and Jack Bowling for the future—the door-bell rang.

"I can't see any one now," Ruth exclaimed in a panic.

He sent her into the inner office, reserved for the privacy of his practice, and then answered the call. It was only his assistant, who had returned for some forgotten article. After he had gone, Doctor Webster hastily scanned the telephone directory, found a certain number, and then picked up the receiver.

"Plaza 3300. Hello! Give me the gymnasium.—Is Mr. Bowling there? Let me speak to him.—Hello! Is that you, Bowling? You are speaking to Doctor Ralph Webster. I want you to come to my office at once. Oh, I know—you're busy—you're about to start for the Olympian games. But this is much more important.—Yes, she is here. Yes, she has told me.—You must come.—You will? All right. Good-by!"

He disconnected, and then called for another number.

"Give me 1547 John. I want Judge White. That you, judge? Webster speaking. Could you run up to my office? Yes, it is very important. In

fact, I want you to perform a marriage ceremony right away.—It must be done, and done now. Good! Hurry, please!”

Then with something like a sigh of relief, he threw open the door of the inner office and asked Ruth to come out. His manner changed; he was kinder now, more like his old self.

“Ruth,” he asked gently, “does Bowling still love you?”

“He never did—in the right way,” she answered sadly.

“But you love him?”

“Oh, I don’t know,” she exclaimed hopelessly. “Why do you ask me so many questions? I’m so frightened. I thought you would help me.”

He caught a sinister meaning in her plea.

“So that’s what you want!”

There was a new note of harshness in his voice. Another illusion—that of Ruth’s utter *naïveté*—faded out in his heart.

“You are asking me to break the most sacred oath a man was ever called upon to take,” he informed

her coldly. "You don't realize what you are asking."

He arose, and went to the framed document which had interested Freddie Donlin an hour before. He took it to her, and held it before her eyes, pointing out line after line.

"Look here. This is the Oath of Hippocrates—a vow that should bind all physicians. Read it carefully."

"I swear by Apollo the Physician, and Æsculapius, and Hygiea, and Panacea, and all the gods and goddesses, that according to my ability and judgment I will keep this oath and this stipulation: To reckon him who taught me this art equally dear to me as my parents, to share my substance with him and relieve his necessities if required, to look upon his offspring in the same footing as my own brothers, and to teach them this art, if they shall wish to learn it, without fee or stipulation, and that by precept, lecture, and every other mode of instruction, I will impart a knowledge of this art to my own sons, and

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those of my teachers, and to disciples bound by a stipulation and oath according to the laws of medicine, but to none others. I will follow that system of regimen which according to my ability and judgment I consider for the benefit of my patients, and will abstain from whatever is deleterious and mischievous. I will give no deadly medicine to any one if asked, nor suggest any such counsel. In like manner I will not give to a woman the means to produce abortion. With purity and with holiness I will pass my life and practise my art. Into whatever houses I enter, I will go into them for the benefit of the sick, and will abstain from every voluntary act of mischief and corruption, and further, from the seduction of females or males, of freemen or slaves. Whatever, in connection with my professional practice or not in connection with it, I see or hear in the life of men which ought not to be spoken of abroad, I will not divulge, as reckoning that all such should be kept secret. While I continue to keep this oath unviolated, may it be granted to me to enjoy life and the practice of the art, respected by all men in

all times. But should I trespass and violate this oath, may the reverse be my lot."

As her eye followed his finger through that impressive vow, he spoke some of its sentences aloud, as solemnly as if he were reading from the Bible:

"I swear by Apollo the Physician—and all the gods and goddesses, that according to my ability and judgment I will keep this oath" . . .

"I will give no deadly medicine to any one, if asked; and in like manner I will not give to a woman——"

He broke off and asked:

"Do you understand fully what that phrase means?"

She nodded, and he continued reading:

"With purity and holiness I will pass my life and practise my art" . . .

"Whatever I see or hear in the life of men which ought not to be spoken of abroad, I will not divulge" . . .

When she had taken in the full significance of

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that lofty document of antiquity, the doctor added sharply:

"So, you see, it is impossible for me to do what you ask."

"I thought doctors—sometimes——" She broke down, and could not finish.

"Yes," he returned, "there are doctors, I regret to say, who break not only that oath, but the criminal laws of the country as well. Most of them are arrant quacks who prey upon the unfortunate. The others are the unscrupulous men of ability. They may prosper for a while at this kind of thing, but eventually one of the patients dies. Then the doctor who broke his oath finds himself in the courts with his evil practices exposed, his reputation ruined, and a prison sentence staring him in the face."

"Then it is fear of discovery——" she began indignantly; but he checked her with a statement, the severe truth of which she could not doubt:

"No! It might cost you your life!"

She sank down in a chair, muttering that she would rather die than be disgraced in this way.

"Die at my hands?" he cried. "Think what you

"You haven't lost everything," he insisted.

"I have lost *you*," she answered wistfully.

This glimmer of a re-awakening of the old romance stirred unhappy memories in the doctor's heart. She had touched a sore place, and he winced under the pain of it.

"If I don't show all I feel," he answered ruefully, "it's not because I am without feeling. Please don't think that, Ruth."

Then, after a pause:

"Perhaps it was my own fault, after all. Perhaps if I had been more demonstrative, more tender, things might have been different. But you were all that was pure and beautiful to me. If I seemed cold, it was because I respected you, and love cannot live without respect."

She echoed his phrase.

"That's true. That is what has happened. Ralph, your love for me is dead—the only real love I ever had. I have killed it!—You tell me I have committed no crime against Nature's laws. I tell you I have! I have killed something more precious than a human life—the love of a good man!"

He tried to check her with a cry of protest. But she went on, more intensely, in an outburst of self-condemnation:

"Don't you think I see and know what I've done, and what it means? And the punishment I must bear? Do you imagine I only realized the truth when I came here to-day? I've known it for weeks! That night—that hideous night—a thought crept into my brain, a little thought which grew until it had a giant's strength. It has obsessed me. Night and day it has haunted me! I have thrown away the good love for the bad! It must have been because I was bad at heart!—What else is there left for me to live for now?"

"Your child," he reminded her.

"It would be better if we both died!" she cried, in a passion of hysteria. "A thousand times better!"

She threw herself on the lounge, prostrated with grief and remorse.

A flower was standing in a vase on the doctor's desk, a calla lily,—the gift of a patient that morning. Its graceful, immaculate beauty, an exquisite symbol of purity, caught the doctor's eye. He picked it up,

took a magnifying glass, and sat down beside Ruth.

"Hold up your head," he said, "and dry your eyes. I want you to look at this flower with me, and try to get my point of view. Will you?"

She said she would try and strove to hush her sobs.

"The story of life in all flowering plants," he explained, "begins in the flower, such as this. In each flower, the father and mother natures exist, and when the pollen on the stamen is carried into the pistil—and nature is very artful in planning for this—the plant is fertilized and becomes fruitful. Were this not so, no new grasses, plants or trees would come into the world with the re-awakening of spring; and this earth would become a barren desert. The flower bears seed, which fall to the ground. Rain and sun cause them to put forth the energy they have inherited; they sprout, and the little stems appear above ground. They are nothing in the world but baby plants, or trees, or grasses. This is the course of Nature, Ruth,—eternally following a beautiful and mysterious law. But if I brush off the pollen, which is the father element, so"

—he illustrated—“or injure the pistil, which is the mother element, I destroy Nature’s great purpose. I kill something beautiful, something that the world needs.”

She saw the parallel, and admitted its logic.

“You are right,” she said. “It would be a crime, a murder.”

He put his hand on her shoulder tenderly, and tried to comfort her.

“Out of the anguish which now wrings your heart, there will be born the deepest and purest happiness you have ever known. The moment when you hear your child’s first cry, when you hold your baby in your arms, you will thank God I refused to do what you asked.”

Her eyes filled with tears again, and she drooped toward him. He took her in his arms as if she were his daughter, still trying to comfort her, and she nestled close in his embrace, like a grief-stricken child.

Suddenly, without a knock or a word of warning, Jack Bowling threw open the door and walked in.

CHAPTER XIV

THE HEART OF A BOY

DOCTOR WEBSTER's telephone message had been a shock to the young athlete. He had been having his unhappy days and nights over Ruth, and his responsibility toward her was weighing heavily upon him. He had hardly understood why she had run away from him, without another word, that evening when she told him about the consequences of their romance; but he did not trouble himself much over that. If she were angry with him, he thought, it was because of her distracted condition, and she would forgive him soon enough.

But the fear of the future, the scandal and ridicule that exposure would inevitably bring, harried and tormented him. It would mean leaving college, a furtive marriage, a job in his father's office;—all the bonds and burdens of matrimony and paternity were to be his fate, at one fell swoop. He hated

the thought of it all; he hated himself for getting caught in this trap of fate; he even, momentarily, hated Ruth, though he took all the blame on himself for being such a consummate fool. He was, indeed, thoroughly panic-stricken.

Several days had elapsed since Ruth told him what had happened, and he had not seen her. He had tried to telephone her the next morning, but Mrs. Franklin, who answered the call, had told him she couldn't be disturbed. No, it was nothing serious, she had asserted, cheerily enough; Miss Stanley was merely out of sorts and didn't want to see any one. He had telephoned several other times, with the same results. Then he had written her notes, and sent her telegrams, without getting any answer.

He persuaded himself that this lack of response from Ruth was reassuring. If things had been as serious as she thought, he told himself, she wouldn't continue to avoid him. She had probably discovered that she was mistaken, and was too embarrassed to send him word. Still, if she knew how much he was worrying——! Then he would get a little angry

with her for not trying to spare him the gray hairs he felt certain would be his if this thing didn't come out all right.

And all the while he kept on doggedly with his course of training for the Olympian games, because the time set for the team's departure was close at hand. Freddie Donlin, observing a drawn look in his cheeks and a strained expression around his eyes, told him he was cutting it too fine, and ordered him to take a rest; but he disregarded Freddie's advice and did his long-distance run every day, going almost to the limit of his strength and taking a grim kind of pleasure in this Spartan discipline. If he didn't run himself dog-weary in the afternoon, he couldn't sleep at night.

The day of departure had arrived. He had heard nothing more from Ruth, so she *must* be all right. In his heart he knew this was a fallacy, but it was a comforting one. His steamer trunk was on the dock; his friends were crowding around him in the gymnasium to say good-by and wish him luck.

Then the tinkle of a telephone bell, and an urgent

demand that he hurry to Doctor Webster's office!

He knew exactly what it meant. She had gone to Webster with her story. But why, out of all the doctors in New York, to him? The thought that this former rival of his, the man whom he had "cut out," would now begin to meddle officiously in his affairs, filled him with exasperation. Why had she done it just at this time? Why hadn't she asked his advice?

He was in a rebellious mood as he jumped into a taxi and told the chauffeur to break all the traffic laws he could without getting arrested. He felt as if, somehow or other, he wasn't getting a square deal. Ruth hadn't played fair with him by telling the story to that doctor of hers.

Bowling threw open the door of the doctor's office with a sense of annoyance. His temper and nerves were on edge.

What he saw turned him white-hot with rage; Ruth's head was on the doctor's shoulder, and his arm was around her waist. They looked like lovers.

Add jealousy to the various other emotions from

which Jack Bowling was suffering at that moment, and you get a dangerous combination. Thus an ordinarily pleasant, attractive and well-bred young man, to whom the minor chivalries came naturally, was transformed into a sinister complex of sullen anger, suspicion, cynicism and resentment.

The doctor had been saying to Ruth: "We must face this situation with cool heads."

Jack stared at them a moment, and then sneered: "Yes, we'll need cool heads."

Ruth gave a cry of alarm, and the doctor rose to his feet with dignity.

"Close the door," he directed.

"I left it open because I expected to go at once," Jack retorted. "From what I have seen, I think my presence here is superfluous. Evidently you've changed your minds, you two, since you telephoned me."

"No, we haven't changed our minds," answered the doctor soberly.

"What was it then—a change of hearts?"

Ruth flushed at Jack's insinuation, the tone of

which could not be mistaken, choked back an angry answer, and turned her back on him.

"This is no time for such talk," Doctor Webster remarked. "We have serious business to attend to."

"Yes, serious business indeed! I came here at your request, because you told me the woman I intend to marry was here. Now, what's your serious business with me?"

"I have telephoned Judge White," the doctor answered firmly, "to come here and marry you and Ruth."

Ruth started in surprise;—so this was what the doctor meant when he promised to help her. Jack gave him a vicious look.

"What business is it of yours, I'd like to know? I am capable of arranging my own affairs and selecting my own judge or minister. Who appointed you master of ceremonies?"

The doctor glanced at Ruth, who faced Jack defiantly and said, with a conviction she did not feel:

"I did!"

"Well, I'll admit that you have some justifica-

tion," the young man replied, and his anger began to fade out. "But, Ruth, was it necessary to drag Judge White into our secret? He is my father's attorney. They are the best of friends. It isn't pleasant to have him know."

"Bowling," the doctor declared impressively, "Judge White belongs to a certain society founded on the brotherhood of man. Your father is a member of that order, and so am I. You, of course, cannot understand what that means, or you would not have committed the folly which might have made a wreck of this girl's life. If your father ever learns the truth, he will thank me for asking Judge White to perform this ceremony."

"It's to be a secret, then?"

The doctor nodded.

"That part of it is all right, but—see here. I ought to be on the boat now. She sails at four o'clock, and there is no one to take my place. I want to do the right thing, but confound it! I don't want to be made a fool!"

"What do you mean?" Ruth asked sharply.



"WHY DOESN'T HE MARRY YOU HIMSELF?" JACK DEMANDED CYNICALLY

"Just this: When I came in here, I found you in his arms. I think you still love each other. If that's the state of affairs, what is the use of our marriage?"

He paused, and then added cynically:

"Why doesn't he marry you himself?"

These words struck Ruth like a blow to the heart. She staggered as if she were going to faint, and she would have fallen if the doctor had not caught her by the arm. He led her toward the inner office, saying, "He didn't mean that. He doesn't understand."

"He never did. He never can understand," the girl sobbed.

"I'll make him understand," the doctor promised, as he closed the door on her and turned to face Bowling, who had looked on sullenly, without making a movement to assist Ruth.

Webster invited the young man to sit down, and he coolly took a chair by the doctor's desk, after tossing his hat on the table.

"Bowling, you're just starting out in life," Doctor

Webster said. "You have everything in your favor, but you are very dense. I believe Ruth loved me once,—but she was young. She felt your physical magnetism. I understood, but she did not. I had no desire to hold her to her promise, against her will, so I stepped aside. I gave you full sway. You know the result. Now, I can't blame you,—I blame myself."

Bowling gazed at the doctor as if he had suddenly gone mad.

"Yes, myself. I should not have stepped aside. I should not have permitted you to come near her. I should have kept you away from her, even if I had to kill you!"

The doctor said this between clenched teeth, in a way which indicated he was fully able to carrying out such a threat. Then he went on:

"The man who tries to give happiness to another by destroying his own is a fool. This is my mistake—mine! And that is why I appointed myself master of ceremonies for this marriage. Bowling, if you were not the father of her unborn child, I'd see you

damned before I would give her up to you! But you *are* its father. Therefore, you will make her your wife just as soon as Judge White arrives. Then you can go to Europe,—or to hell, for all I care!”

“Are you setting yourself up as my guardian for life?” the younger man asked ironically.

“No; but I assume the responsibility of being the guardian of that girl’s happiness.”

A light rap at the outer door interrupted them. Doctor Webster observed that it was doubtless Judge White, whom he expected any moment, and asked Jack to step into the inner office, with Ruth, for a moment. In a hang-dog kind of way, the prospective bridegroom obeyed, and then Doctor Webster admitted, not Judge White, but an unexpected and altogether unwelcome guest—Della Forbush.

CHAPTER XV.

AN ARGUMENT OVER ETHICS

DELLA's manner was less buoyant than customary as she greeted the doctor. She had a business-like way about her that afternoon, and she disregarded the doctor's hint that she had come after office hours.

"I didn't come to see you professionally," she stated, as she plumped herself firmly into a chair. "I've been reading Bernard Shaw, and so I don't believe in doctors any more."

"Then why did you come?" he asked, with an inviting look toward the door and a restlessness that was more real than pretended.

"I wanted to talk to you about Ruth. She has become so morbid. Have you seen her lately?"

"What do you think is the cause of this change in her?" he parried.

"I don't know, but ever since that day at her

house—when Jack Bowling was there, remember?—she hasn't been her real self. I have tried to cheer her up, but it's no use. I've almost had to break into the studio to see her at all, and then she seemed depressed and brooding."

He suggested that money matters might be worrying her, but Della rejected the explanation. Then he advanced the theory that she had received bad news from her mother, and Della declared that Mrs. Stanley had been writing cheerful letters. Then perhaps she was working too hard? Della averred that Ruth hadn't touched a brush to canvas for several weeks.

"She just sits, and thinks, and sighs. I tell you, something terrible must have happened to her. You'll agree with me when you see her."

Doctor Webster rose as if to intimate that the interview was ended, looked at his watch nervously, and shook Della's hand.

"I'll tell you what we'll do," he remarked persuasively, as he gently guided her in the direction of the door. "You run along, get your dinner, and

be ready to go up to her house with me to-night. I'll call for you at eight o'clock. We'll see if we can't cheer her up."

Della thought that was an excellent idea, but stopped short just when she was about to confirm the arrangement. Her attention was attracted by something on the doctor's desk.

"Why, there's Jack Bowling's hat!" She picked it up in astonishment. "What's it doing here?" she demanded.

"I think you are mistaken," he observed coolly.

"Not much! I made that hat band for him. Don't you think I know my own stitches? Has he been here too? I was going down to the dock this afternoon to see the team sail. It's nearly time, too!"

"Why don't you get Ruth to go with you?" the doctor suggested craftily. "It might do her good."

"I telephoned her on my way down here," Della answered, still holding the tell-tale hat and looking at it curiously, "but she was out.—Are you sure you haven't seen her lately, doctor?"

"She will probably be home by dinner time. Better try again."

Della's inquisitive gaze began to rove around the room as if she were taking an inventory, and the doctor became restless. Suddenly she pounced down into a corner of the lounge, and plucked up something that had been half hidden under a cushion.

"Ruth's hand-bag!" she exclaimed, holding it up before his eyes. "Now, doctor, will you kindly answer my question: Have you seen her lately?"

He looked at his watch again, and paced up and down nervously.

"It has been some time since I have seen her, Miss Forbush," he replied.

"Ruth and Jack are here now," she insisted. "They're in your private office. What is the reason of all this mystery?"

Doctor Webster didn't have a chance to evade that direct accusation. While he was feeling for an answer, Judge White walked in on them, chuckling with judicial benignity.

"Hello, doctor! Am I on time?—Why, how do you do, Miss Forbush!"

The judge suddenly became serious. He glanced from Della to the doctor, and then asked glumly:

"I hope, Miss Forbush, you're not going to be the bride?"

"Bride!" Della colored up, looked sharply at the closed door of the inner office, and then sniffed:

"Well, I should say not!"

Doctor Webster informed the judge, with a whispered word and a nod, that the couple were inside, and suggested that he join them. He followed instructions, with a beaming smile over his shoulder in Della's direction. As soon as he had closed the door behind him, Della turned on the doctor.

"So, there is to be a wedding—in a doctor's office—after hours—very quietly! I thought they were to wait until he came back from Europe. Why this haste? There must be some reason——"

Then she sensed what that reason was, gave an exclamation of indignation and horrified modesty, and

started to hurry out as if the place was plague-stricken.

The doctor stopped her imperatively.

"I should like to believe," he said, "that you are above the conventional woman's point of view."

"Are you defending her?" Della asked sarcastically. "You, the man she jilted?"

"I am asking you—Ruth's friend—are you going to condemn her?"

"I don't want to be hard," she answered, with a contemptuous shrug of the shoulders, "but one must draw the line somewhere."

"And where do you draw the line?" he challenged. "Right where charity begins? There is the line"—he traced an imaginary boundary across the top of his desk—"the social dead-line. While you are both on that side, you are on an equal footing. Her position is just as good as yours. It is no condescension for you to call her your friend.—But let her cross that line—what then?"

"A woman cannot follow her friends beyond that line," said Della primly.

"That's the test of friendship," he stated. "This is the time to prove the stuff you are made of."

"Would you expect a girl to risk her own reputation," she retorted, "in order to prove her friendship? One gives love and friendship to those whom they respect,—not to the unworthy. No, doctor, it's out of the question."

She started for the door again, but he would not let her go.

"Look here, Miss Forbush," he said bluntly, "you cannot leave this office feeling as you do toward Ruth. I will not let you draw your skirts aside and point a scornful finger at this unhappy girl. Search your own heart! Look back over your own life. Isn't there one blemish, one fault, that you wish screened from the world?"

"You know there isn't anything of the sort!" she exclaimed indignantly.

"But what evidence have you that Ruth's position is any different from your own? Circumstantial evidence of the most trivial kind!"

Della retorted that the evidence was strong enough

to be convincing, and that the doctor himself had admitted as much.

"I admit nothing," he answered. "I will maintain, however, that you yourself are probably prompted by jealousy."

She bristled up at this surprising accusation, and demanded an explanation.

"Yes, jealousy," the doctor repeated firmly. "You yourself felt the strong physical attraction of this boy, and—because of the lack of certain chemical elements in your nature, your glance and touch failed to kindle in him the spark that would have set your two souls and bodies on fire."

Della gasped, and then blushed:—the gasp was evoked by this materialistic analysis of the enigma called love, and the blush by the blunt assertion that she herself was not immune from its crude and primitive manifestations. She raised the storm-signals of a modest young lady's indignation, and sputtered:

"Doctor Webster! What are you saying?"

"I am unmasking your soul, so you may realize

how absurd it is for you to mount a pedestal and imagine you are wearing a halo instead of a new hat. You are responsible for Bowling's coming into Ruth's life. You were infatuated with him yourself. You wanted his portrait;—you induced Ruth to paint it. That was the beginning of this affair. You didn't count upon his infatuation for Ruth. It cut you up a bit to think that he had preferred her to yourself, and that feeling of irritation and jealousy, not your sense of rectitude, is what makes you so ready to condemn her."

"No one has dared to talk to me like this before!" she exclaimed in bewilderment.

"It is the truth that hurts," he answered.

Della was defeated, and was ready to admit it. The doctor had made her see life, and herself as a part of it, stripped of all illusions, all sentimentality, all prudery. She sat down weakly, and murmured:

"You say such brutal things."

"A touch of caustic heals a festering wound," he observed.

She began to daub her handkerchief to her eyes,

which were brimming with tears, and begged him not to say anything more on that phase of the topic.

"I am sorry to have pained you," he remarked, lapsing from his cold, scientific manner into a friendly mood. "The surgeon's knife must cut deep at times;—now let us see if we cannot heal the hurt. Miss Forbush, you and I are in the same position, more or less. Let us be charitable, and agree between ourselves right here that we will never speak or permit others to speak one word of scandal against Ruth. Let's be friends again, and in doing good, perhaps—who knows—we may find a little happiness ourselves."

Della dried her eyes and confessed:

"I always loved Ruth. I wouldn't hurt her for the world.—I did care for Jack—for a while—and I was cut up; but it's all over now. It has been for some time. The Lord deliver me from any more college boys!"

She shook hands warmly with the doctor, and gave him a heart-felt promise that she would do as he advised.

"I'd go to Ruth now," she continued, "but I don't want them to see I have been crying.—Are my eyes red?—Will you tell Judge White I'll expect him to-morrow at two o'clock? I'm not going near that dock to see those boys sail."

At the door she turned with her old smile, and flashed out merrily:

"My, what a good fight we've had, haven't we, doctor?"

"I hope you will forget all the harsh things I said," he answered.

"Oh, I deserved them. I feel better now. Why, you've made me feel almost human. Good-by, doctor!"

Then, with a long breath of relief, the doctor went to the door of the inner office and called out his little wedding party.

CHAPTER XVI

A GIRL'S REBELLION

RUTH and Jack Bowling came out of the private office together; she pale and shrinking; he flushed and resolute. Judge White followed them, looking slightly self-conscious.

Bowling faced Doctor Webster candidly, and spoke up like a man.

"We've talked this matter over, and I want to apologize for what I said a while ago. I'm going to do my duty by Ruth;—I'm going to marry her."

The word "duty" caused Ruth to start as if she had been struck. She seemed to wince under it, and then her face seemed to grow harder and sterner, as if from some new decision.

"Going to marry her?" the doctor repeated, turning to Judge White in surprise. "Haven't you already performed the ceremony?"

"Not yet," the judge explained. "I couldn't

do it without a license and witnesses, you know."

He shrugged his shoulders as if in deprecation of the doctor's legal ignorance, and the latter awkwardly admitted that he had forgotten about those essential details.

"It's too late to-day," the judge continued. "The county clerk's office closes at one on Saturdays. We will have to wait until Monday."

"Haven't we time to go to Jersey before the boat leaves?" Doctor Webster asked.

"We might have time to go there," said the judge, smiling cheerfully, "but we would hardly have time to get the knot tied in a satisfactory way. These things can't be done in a jiffy, you know, even in Jersey."

Jack remarked that they might try it, but the discussion of ways and means was interrupted for the violent incursion of Freddie Donlin, heated from fast travel.

Freddie flung open the door, shouting, "Say, Doc, have you seen——?" Then he caught sight of Jack, and exploded:

"Oh, there you are! Where the devil have you been? We've been looking all over town for you! I've had three taxicabs loaded with scouts on your trail! Don't you know the boat leaves at four o'clock?"

"Yes, I know," said Jack stiffly, "but—I can't go."

"Can't go?" shrieked Freddie. "What are you talking about? What's the reason you can't go? Have you gone daffy?"

"I can't tell you, but I can't go!"

Jack's tone was emphatic, and his manner final. Freddie became panic-stricken.

"You're not sick, or hurt, are you? Doc, is there anything the matter with him? For the love of Mike, tell him he's all right! We've got to have him to win that Marathon! This is going to be the biggest meet that ever came off, and we need him! If he lays down on us—Oh, come on, Jack!"

Freddie grabbed Jack by the arm and tried to drag him toward the door.

"I can't go, I tell you!" said Jack angrily, throw-

ing off Freddie's grip on his sleeve. "You've got Brownley with you. He'll make good."

"Brownley my grand-daddy!" ejaculated Freddie in disgust. "You'll make me swear in a minute, right before everybody."

"I'm sorry," Jack answered. "I've had my heart set on this event. You know how hard I've trained. But I can't go! Stop talking about it!"

Then Freddie lost his temper.

"I tell you, if you lay down on us now, there isn't a university man in the world who won't turn his back on you! You'll be kicked out of every athletic club you dare stick your nose into! You'll be hooted out of your fraternity! You'll be an out-cast, and you know it! You can't do it! Nothing short of accident or death will be accepted as an excuse by the rest of the boys! You've got to go! Come on!"

Again he laid violent hands upon Jack, and again he was thrown off. He appealed to the doctor and the judge.

"What do you say, Doc? And you, Judge

White? You're both university men! You know what it means to all of us!"

Doctor Webster shook his head in answer to this plea; the judge had nothing to say, and Freddie became almost tearful in his despair.

"Oh, Gee! I can't tell the boys he isn't coming," he moaned. "They'd lynch me if I did!"

"It is a question for Mr. Bowling to decide for himself," the doctor said.

"Then I'll decide it for him!" Freddie raged. "He can't ditch us this way at the last minute.—Will you come?"

"No!"

"Oh yes, you will!" Freddie screamed. "I know a way to make you!"

He dashed out as if he were trying to make a new sprinting record. Jack closed the door after him, with a troubled air, and then turned to Ruth.

"Now, Ruth, what do you say?" he asked. "I think Freddie is going to bring the rest of the team up here, to persuade me to go, or try to carry me

off. Shall I go? We will be married the day I get back. It's up to you. What do you say?"

He was worried and anxious, obviously ready to stand by his agreement to marry her forthwith, but obviously eager, also, to fulfil his athletic duty to his college.

Ruth had stood in the back-ground during the wrangle with Freddie, apparently uninterested in its outcome. At Jack's appeal to her, she turned toward him calmly, and said, slowly and firmly:

"My answer is—whether you go or whether you stay—it makes no difference to me. I won't marry you!"

The three men stood aghast at this declaration. She could not have surprised them more if she had thrown a bomb. There were exclamations of protest and amazement.

"I won't!" she repeated stubbornly.

"Why?" demanded the judge, in tones of judicial thunder.

Ruth faced the doctor, who had become speechless at this collapse of his plans.

"Oh, I know you almost talked me into it a moment ago," she said, "and if the license had been secured, I would now be his wife, according to the law."

"I've told you it is the only way," boomed the judge. "Ruth, you must marry him."

"And I told you," blustered Jack, "that I'm willing to do my duty. Isn't that enough?"

"Enough? No, it's not enough!"

He withered under her blazing eyes, and she turned to the doctor:

"You say I obeyed the natural law,—that my sin was only against the laws of man, and that the injury to these man-made laws must be repaired. Are they higher than Nature's laws? To repair an injury to them, my dead father's old friend"—she indicated the judge—"asks me to think of the blessings such a marriage would provide: a name, a position, and the comforts of life; and promises me that he"—she pointed at Jack scornfully—"would provide for the child and grow to love it. And now, to obey these laws, the stronger of the two sinners—

for he sinned as well as I—makes a generous sacrifice and condescends to marry me, and thus do his duty! Wonderful things, your man-made laws—made only for men!”

All the bitterness that had filled her heart for weeks poured itself out in a flood of irony, and with her impassioned outburst she dominated the men who wanted her to act as they thought best.

“Have I no voice in all this legal program?” she continued. “Have I no rights, or must the woman forever bear the burden, just so your man-made laws may be upheld? Yes, I have some rights, and I am going to stand by them. I will not marry a man who doesn’t love me! I don’t want his name! I won’t have it! And as for the baby, he shall not grow to love it;—it’s not his! It’s going to be mine, all mine! I’ll work my finger-ends off sooner than let him provide for me! I hate his sense of duty! I hate you all! Marry him?”

She laughed hysterically.

“Marry him?—If I’m going to be damned for

what I've done, I'll be damned alone! Alone, I tell you, *alone!*"

She struck her clenched hands down upon the desk fiercely, in an ecstasy of rebellion. Her knuckles were bruised and bleeding, but she did not feel the pain. The three men were subjugated by her tempestuous assertion of freedom, and could find no words to answer her.

Exhausted by the emotional storm, the girl reeled as if she were about to faint. The doctor and the judge went to her in alarm, but she caught the edge of the desk, steadied herself, and faced them defiantly, denying the physical weakness that needed their support, and their outstretched arms dropped down at their sides as she silently asserted her spiritual strength and the self-sufficiency of her sex.

Ruth Stanley left the office as she wanted to go, alone, with no sentimental props to help her face the world, and no dutiful hands to guide her faltering foot-steps.

CHAPTER XVII

READY FOR THE MARATHON

JACK BOWLING was in a kind of daze as he stepped into the elevator that dropped him to the street-level after Ruth's stormy outburst of defiance had overwhelmed him with confusion. The contempt and scorn with which she had refused to marry him burned in him like a fever, shriveling up his self-conceit, withering his egotism. When he had made his offer, he had felt that his conduct was exemplary; but now his emotions were those of a whipped school-boy.

He was humiliated, resentful and angry; but these emotions were smothered under a sense of his own insignificance and Ruth's amazing manifestation of spiritual superiority. He could not yet understand her attitude, but her fantastic courage in throwing down the gauntlet to the whole world compelled his admiration.

He was unable to analyze his mood, for a college hero who has just been toppled off his pedestal with a resounding crash is in no state of mind to think clearly; but he kept expressing his impression of Ruth in a phrase of his own code.

"By Jove, but she's game!" he was repeating to himself, like a refrain.

He started down the street aimlessly, with no sense of direction and no purpose in mind, but he had not gone far before a touring car loaded with collegians swept up to the curb beside him. Its crew jumped out, with wild whoops and hurrahs, and charged him in a flying wedge, headed by Freddie Donlin. They gave him no chance for explanations, but swept him up on their shoulders and quickly dumped him into the tonneau.

"What are you trying to do, Freddie!" gasped Jack, squirming under the weight of a couple of beefy football players.

"We're going to abduct you!" roared Freddie. "Hold him down, fellows! Sit on him!"

A few minutes later they were at the pier, in the

midst of a cheering crowd. Jack was rushed up the gangway like a prisoner, and kept under surveillance by Freddie and his henchmen until there was a wide lane of water between the ship and the dock.

Jack watched the impressive sky-line of Manhattan slip slowly away with a nameless ache in his heart. He kept the towering building in which he had last seen Ruth in view as long as he could identify it in the majestic panorama. The memory of her as she declared her rebellion of soul obsessed him;—until then, he had always thought of her as a girl,—a very pretty and appealing girl, but there was a wonder and a power in her face when she had spoken out for her soul's freedom that had transfigured her. He had not known she was so beautiful.

That voyage was no pleasure trip for Bowling, although it was his first cruise across the Atlantic ocean to those historic lands that every American hopes to see 'before he dies. There was then no threat of the great cataclysm of European war, and every one on the steamer was a joyous pilgrim, except Jack. He fretted against the tedium of the

vast sea spaces, and although it was a pleasant crossing, blessed by calm weather and blue skies, he kept in his cabin as much as he could. Freddie Donlin and the other athletic advisers held frequent conferences about Jack's condition and state of mind, worrying over the possibility of his having "gone stale," and Freddie's confidential explanation—"he's had some kind of a row with his girl"—was accepted as ominous.

While the others were sky-larking about, or seeking promising candidates for ship-board flirtations among the young ladies on the passenger list, Jack was thinking out the problem of his life and Ruth's.

He came to understand, soon enough, how, without the consciousness of being selfish, he had wounded her deepest feelings. He realized how, when the test came—the evening when she had told him she was going to be a mother—he had thought only of himself. He had acted like a boy instead of a man,—like a spoiled boy who resents and thrusts aside responsibility. And when ready to accept that

responsibility he had spoken of it as a duty—the one word that love will not accept.

Up to that time he had blamed Ruth, in his heart, for yielding to him. He had silently accused her of being weak; but now he began to accuse himself in the same terms and worse, and to blame himself for not having been chivalrous enough to protect her against herself. He began to place himself on trial before the court of his own conscience, seeking to take all the burden of the sin upon his own shoulders.

But in all his attempts to clear the girl and blame himself, he came up against a grim barrier:—here he was, escaping scot-free, while she was back in New York taking all the punishment. She would suffer terrible physical pain; she would be in danger of death, and when that phase of her trouble had passed, she would face a life-time of unhappiness.

He yearned to help her, but she had refused his help. He wanted to be with her, but she had lashed him out of her presence with contemptuous words.

The young man worried himself haggard with such thoughts as these; and when he stepped out of the tent that flew the American colors, one bright June afternoon in Stockholm, to compete in the crowning event of the Olympian games, his associates shook their heads gloomily. He did not look fit for the race.

It was an inspiring occasion;—flags were flying, bands were playing, the cheering thousands of spectators in the stadium were waving hats, canes and pennants. The picked athletes of the world were in the great arena, hot at their games, and assembling by the judges' stand, opposite a gorgeous box in which sat the King and Queen of Sweden and a couple of visiting monarchs, were the wiry, deep-chested young men who would run until their feet bled and their hearts broke to prove that to-day mankind is as strong, and as fleet, and as untiring as it was in the days of Marathon. The King himself would crown the winner with the laurel wreath that symbolized the ancient Greek ideal of supreme physical prowess.

This was the event for which Jack Bowling had been preparing himself for a year or more. He had dreamed of the glory of it, and had been intoxicated with the ambition to bring the colors of his country and his college first across the tape that marked the finish of the long, slow grind. Everything else had been of secondary importance. He had won the race, in imagination, a thousand times, and had swelled with the pride of returning home as a conquering hero, with the world at his feet.

But the whole affair seemed insignificant to him now. It was like an ordinary track meet, he told himself, only a little bigger and more noisy. The King, stolidly perched in his box, looked bored and stupid, and his royal consort was an insipid matron, badly dressed, Jack told himself. He took his place at the mark, between a skinny, sallow Finn, who stared at him feverishly, and a studious-looking Englishman wearing the Oxford colors, who gave him a friendly nod.

A fat and puffy judge of the course, absurdly dressed in a frock coat, was scampering up and down

the line of runners, giving them final advice on the rules of the event. He was talking in French, and Jack couldn't understand a word. The Englishman, guessing as much, translated for him briefly. The Finn was nervously re-tying his shoe-laces. Freddie Donlin, somewhere in the rear of the group, was fiendishly shrieking his college yell. Would that fool never grow up? Jack asked himself sullenly.

He began to wish the race was over, and felt a dread of the hours of terrible effort that were before him. What good would it do to win? He glanced at the Englishman beside him, who seemed such a decent sort of chap, and wished him luck. What good to run till your heart pounds like a surf against your ribs, till your throat chokes, and your swollen tongue lolls out of your mouth, and your eyes go blind, and a deathly nausea makes you want to die?

Well, he told himself, he would run the race like that,—not because it meant anything to him, win or lose, not for his college, or his country, or any of that kind of "bunk," but because there was an

unhappy girl back in New York who might think of him a little less scornfully if he should win. She might even be a little proud of him, after all. This race belonged to their romance, somehow; it was a part of their story, and so he would make it come out right, if he could. He would run the race for her.

Suddenly a pistol cracked, and they were off on the long, bitter grind of the Marathon, with the finish twenty-five miles away. Before Jack's eyes, as he fell into a long, easy stride, was the face of a girl who seemed to mock at him.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE NEW LIFE BEGINS

RUTH STANLEY's great revolt, which had found expression in that hysterical denunciation of the men who would have compelled her to act as they thought best, was, psychologically, the best thing that could have happened to her. It cleared the air for her; it freed her soul, somehow, of self-torment. She herself did not realize the fact, but the truth of the matter was that she had grown up in a single day, had changed from a stricken, harried girl to a well-poised woman who was unhappy, certainly, but who knew how to fight her unhappiness. She had found herself.

She went home and straightway strove to forget that life was treating her cruelly by facing its difficulties in a practical way. There was work to do, for instance; money to be earned. She must begin to prepare for the demands of the future. She must

make her own way, and fight her own fight. When the great miracle of motherhood came to her, she must be prepared to provide for her child. There were many other problems, of course, but that was the most important; in fact, they were all combined in that great responsibility.

She thought of her mother, and decided to spare her the shock of such an announcement as long as possible. When the time drew near, she would write her everything, and then follow her letter to California, where events would take their course. After that, she would never come back. Before that, there was nothing to do but work.

As soon as she entered her studio, after that painful scene in Doctor Webster's office, she felt a little disgusted with the evidence of the Ruth Stanley that had been, in every nook and corner. Here were the girlish fripperies, the foolish ornaments, the attempts to create an "artistic" atmosphere, that were memories of the girl she had ceased to be.

She had been a weak, sentimental little girl, the other Ruth, she decided, just the silly, romantic kind

of child who would have gotten herself into such a scrape as this. She had loved this room once; now it seemed repugnant to her.

She decided to clean house at once; and she made a thorough job of it, much to the perplexity of Mrs. Franklin, who gave feeble assistance. All of the "junk"—she remembered Freddie Donlin's satirical phrase for it—went into the dust-bin. The incense burner was hurled into the outer darkness with particularly spiteful emphasis. The picture of Jack Bowling was banished, without any respectful ceremonies, to the garage, there to await the disposal of Della Forbush. The easel was put away for future use, in happier times.

When she had finished, the place looked like a work-shop instead of a lounging place for a girl with bohemian possibilities. A drawing board, with a drop-light over it, replaced the easel, and there, with pen and ink and water-colors, Ruth hoped to put her training to practical use, as an illustrator and commercial artist. Early the next morning she went out to find work.

Some of her friends in the art school had gone in for commercial work, and were doing well, for the field in New York City is rich with opportunities. From them she got letters to the art editors of magazines, managers of newspaper syndicates, costume designers, and advertising men. She called on these important personages, taking samples of her work with her, and if she was rebuffed, she went back again the next morning, more determined than ever.

She found that it wasn't difficult to get a hearing, for the busiest man is always ready to listen to business conversation from a pretty girl. Some of them were even susceptible enough to give her sketches to do, on approval; and when she submitted the finished product, they surprised themselves by accepting it. So, in three or four places, she soon won a foot-hold, and within two weeks she was busy enough to keep herself from brooding.

It was hum-drum work, all except the illustrating of magazine stories, which was fun. They didn't come her way very often, for the competition was keen and other illustrators were amazingly clever;

but they compensated her for the dreary drudgery over posters and sketches of impossible gowns for use in newspaper advertising. The fees were not handsome, but week by week they amounted to more than many a hard-working married man in that great city was earning. Ruth knew as much, and was grateful to a kind providence. With her own share of the little family income (the executors of the estate had made such an arrangement at her mother's request) and her earnings, she soon found herself in the possession of a growing account in a savings bank, and began to feel the pride of economic independence. She attacked the problem of establishing herself as a commercial artist with desperate energy, and worked hard,—too hard, in fact. The day did not contain enough hours for her, and when she had finished her commissions and should have taken a rest or gone out for a walk, she kept on at her drawing-board, making sketches which might be marketable in the future. She was over-taxing her energy, and she grew thin and pale under the strain; but she drove herself on, feeling that her salvation

depended upon her professional success. She was right, in more ways than one, for this preoccupation with her work kept away brooding, and though it weakened her vitality, it saved her from a serious nervous break-down.

Doctor Webster told her as much, as soon as he found out what she was doing. He had taken to telephoning her every evening, to ask how she was, and to find out, by adroit little questions, what state of mind she was in. He was extremely tactful; he did not refer in any way to the late unpleasantness, or make any laborious attempts to be consoling.

He had decided that Ruth should be permitted to have her own way,—for a while, at any rate, and that interference with her plans might have disastrous results. He understood that she might easily be nagged into an attempt at suicide, or fretted into an illness. He had privately advised Mrs. Franklin that Ruth was not as well as she might be, and asked her to be vigilant and attentive without letting her mistress become aware of it. He also instructed

the housekeeper to report to him if anything untoward happened.

But when Ruth answered his questions more and more cheerfully every day, and exchanged gossip with him brightly, his apprehensions vanished. After these talks he would hang up the telephone receiver with a smile of satisfaction.

After ten days of this diplomacy, over the telephone, he asked Ruth if he might come to see her. She said:

"Do you really want to see me? I'm not an invalid, you know. I'm getting along all right."

"Certainly I want to see you," he replied.

"After the way I have treated you?" she asked, with a little quaver of pathos in her voice.

Then the doctor had surprised Ruth, and himself also, by dropping in the vernacular:

"Oh, forget it!" he growled, good-naturedly.

He called that evening, and they had a pleasant chat, in which they seemed to pick up their friendship as if Jack Bowling had never made a disastrous interruption in their lives. After that, he came

often,—two or three times a week, as his exacting medical duties permitted, and he saw to it that Ruth got some needed fresh air and exercise.

His closest approach to the subject which they both carefully avoided was a reference to Della Forbush.

“Have you heard from Della since—since that afternoon?” he asked.

Ruth clouded up, and said she hadn’t.

“She has left the city for the summer, or at least for a part of the summer,” he remarked, as if apologizing for Della.

“Does she understand about—about me?”

“Yes,” he answered quietly, “and I think she sympathizes.”

“If she knows, I shall never hear from her again,” Ruth observed.

“Don’t be cynical,” he said, and changed the subject.

CHAPTER XIX

AFTER THE RACE

THE problem that this resolute girl had undertaken to solve alone was of staggering proportions. If she had permitted her imagination to dwell upon it, in all its complications, she would have been spiritually crushed under its weight, at the very beginning. Happily for her, she was concentrating all her energies upon its first phase, upon the economic side of her case; and when she proved to her own satisfaction that she was able to support herself, and also earn enough to cope with the financial responsibilities of parenthood, she felt content.

She was, in fact, happy to a degree that surprised her. The consciousness of sin that brings the self-torture of remorse had ceased to trouble her since Doctor Webster had assuaged her grief with his theory of the "natural law"; she knew she had been weak, foolish, lacking in self-control, but she did not

feel besmirched. In her heart she was as virginal as before. The bitterness of her disappointment in the young man to whom she had given her love—a woe that had been vibrant agony in every fiber of her being for weeks past—was fading out, also. She did not know why, and she wondered at her escape from that tragic mood. A sense of well-being saturated her; never in her life had she been physically so peaceful and contented. As resentful thoughts of her lost lover began to disappear, as that experience became more and more remote and vague, like something that had happened in a dream, she troubled herself a little with ideas that hers was a fickle and unstable temperament.

The truth of the matter was that in mind and body she was being soothed by the benediction of coming maternity. The great, mystic peace of fruitfulness was upon her.

So, having won the first skirmishes in her campaign, she did not look forward to the more terrible battles. Her problem was that of a life-time, of two life-times—hers and that of the soul she was

to bring into the world. If she had turned her vision down that long vista of years, she would have been terrified. The loneliness of it, the sense of being an outlaw in the social order, the sneers that were to come, the whispers of gossip, the malice of evil tongues, the horrible impossibility of explaining to her son—and she hoped it would be a son—why he was fatherless—these and the many other distresses of the woman who bears and bravely rears an illegitimate child did not oppress her. They were a part of the future she had chosen, yet she had not begun to consider them. She was living her life day by day, and did not think about the burden of the future.

Others, however, were thinking for her. Her rebellion was only a temporary escape from the solicitude of them that loved her. They were more unhappy than she.

Nearly two weeks after she had delivered her ultimatum about a forced marriage, while she was hurrying toward a magazine editor's office with a portfolio full of sketches, a head-line in big type

on an afternoon newspaper displayed at a corner news-stand, caught her eye. It read: "AMERICAN RUNNER WINS MARATHON."

Then there came to her a poignant memory of Jack Bowling as he had posed for her, in all the grace of his young strength, the ideal athlete ready for his game; and the old pain and grief swiftly caught at her heart. Her eyes filled with tears, and she turned away from that fascinating news-stand, and went on her errand, chin up, defiant, determined that she wouldn't look at a newspaper for a week to come.

She kept her vow, for three hours. Try as she would, she could not forget that head-line, and an emotion began to consume her which she defined as curiosity. Was that American runner who had won the Marathon Jack Bowling? There were to be other American competitors in that race, she remembered.

Just before she reached her home, she weakened, and bought a paper, furtively, as if the patronage of news-boys were a forbidden thing. Her curiosity

was gratified immediately. Bowling had won, according to a cable dispatch from Stockholm.

A Marathon race is almost as devoid of thrills as the progress of a glacier, or the eternal round of a six-day bicycle contest. The achievement is great, but the spectacle is monotonous. It is an epic thing, but its description should be written in terms of endurance on a medical chart.

Bowling plodded on mile after mile, at a pace he was sure would win if he could hold it, and gradually forged farther and farther ahead. He ran like a man in a trance.

At the fifteenth mile he collapsed, and rose again. At the twentieth he fell once more, and fainted. After a few minutes of unconsciousness he got up and staggered forward. He had ceased to suffer the agonies of exhaustion; he was a numb, inert body, in which only the will to win was alive. He was running not on his stamina, but on his nerve, and he won.

He did not know when the race ended. In a kind

of delirium he thought people were trying to stop him—they were the judges of the course and his cheering friends—and he tried to fight his way through the crowd. Then came a blackness like death,—total extinction.

He spent the next week in a hospital, attended by doctors who applied stethoscopes to his heart with keen professional interest. That organ, he gathered from their remarks, was behaving with unprecedented inaccuracy. Freddie Donlin hovered over him, tremulous with ecstasy, a perfect geyser of noisy and irritating congratulations. Oh, the times they would have in London and Paris, with training rules thrown to the winds! was the burden of Freddie's song. He was ready to admit that Swedish punch was a good drink to celebrate on, and that aquavit was strong stuff, but wait until they came within the zone of American bars! Jack ground his teeth at Freddie's picture of bacchic delights, and said nothing.

As soon as his strength returned and the hospital staff lost interest in him, he went to his hotel

and packed up. Then he mapped out an itinerary of the quickest way home, left a note for Freddie apologizing for his desertion, and started back to "God's country." When Freddie woke up after an unusually active experiment with Swedish punch, as a means of demonstrating the glory of the Star Spangled Banner and the athletes who flourish under it, he found that the hero of the Olympian games had fled, and was desolated, but not so deeply plunged in grief as to abandon his designs on London and Paris.

The day after Bowling reached New York, and had been welcomed home with parental pride, he said to his father, in an unusually solemn way:

"I want to have a heart-to-heart talk with you, Governor."

Then, frankly and without sparing himself, he told the story of Ruth Stanley.

Bowling *père* heard his confession without any of the explosions of virtuous wrath that Jack had expected. He merely said:

"You have acted badly, my boy, very badly."

Jack admitted as much.

"You say Judge White knows about all this, and knows the girl?—I must talk with him and Doctor Webster."

"You may talk with Doctor Webster if you like," Jack answered, "but I shall not care to be present. He and I—well, we do not agree about Ruth."

"Very well. It shall be Judge White alone. Of course I want you to be there. Shall we say after dinner, here in the library, to-morrow evening?"

That closed the interview, and Jack went to his own room feeling that he and his father, who gave more attention to his directors' meetings than he did to the family, had suddenly become better friends.

The elder Bowling didn't have any luck in finding Judge White by telephone the next morning. He wasted half an hour of the busiest part of his day at the task, and then growled to himself profanely:

"This blankety-blank judge seems to be out of town just when people need him!"

Whereupon he pressed three buttons, and three

private secretaries entered with celerity. They received instructions to run down the trail of the missing judge, if it took them all day, and to report progress at half-hourly intervals.

They were diligent and efficient young men, and in half an hour Mr. Bowling had the name of a seaside resort and a fashionable hotel thereat in a neat memorandum on his desk. He glanced at it, said "Get him, long distance, now," to one of the secretaries, and began to dictate business correspondence to another.

Five minutes later he was talking to Judge White, one hundred miles away. He spoke urgently and to the point, told the judge what train to catch, and that dinner (informal) would be served at 7:30. When Judge White understood the paternal motive in this strange invitation, he readily accepted, although the trip would cause him to break an extremely attractive engagement.

After dinner, Bowling senior, Jack and the Judge assembled in the library, and certain questions that were on the mind of Mr. Bowling were asked and

answered, to his satisfaction. Then came the summing up.

"Judge White, you inform me, in what I must admit is an eloquent and convincing way, that this girl is worth marrying. Jack, you say that you love her and want to marry her. Well, I'll take your words for it. I shall not insult her, or my son either, by waiting until I can look her over before I give my consent. Go ahead and marry her, Jack. Elope—go abroad—draw on me for any amount. Stay away a year or two, and no one will notice, when you come back, that there has been—er—has been any slight irregularity—er—of consequences. Of course I shall have to tell your mother. That will be the hardest part of it. She will be a little severe on the girl at first,—that's a way mothers have,—but if the young lady is the real thing, matters will soon adjust themselves.—What's the girl doing now?"

"Working hard," said the judge. "She's an artist, you know, and she sells her stuff."

"Supporting herself! Jack, that's more than

you've done, so far. You're lucky. Marry her, and send me a wire."

Jack was almost speechless with gratitude. He tried to express his thanks for the paternal sympathy, and then gave it up. After an embarrassed pause, he remarked:

"It's not as easy as you think, governor. I'm afraid she won't have me now."

"Well, if you are going to let a fool girl's stubborn ideas stand in the way——" Bowling senior began.

"There's something else in the way—or rather somebody else," Jack said. "Doctor Webster."

"That's what Della—I mean Miss Forbush—thinks, too," added Judge White. "The doctor is keeping Ruth and Jack apart."

Mr. Bowling looked at Judge White with a satiric smile, and asked:

"Exactly what does Della—I mean Miss Forbush—think, your honor?"

"That Doctor Webster's influence on Ruth prevents her from doing what she ought to do—marry

Jack. He seems to approve of her stand against the boy. He was once engaged to her, you know."

"I see. A rival. Knows the whole story, too.—What's he going to do about it?"

Jack and the judge confessed ignorance on that point.

"Queer situation," remarked Mr. Bowling. "It's got me guessing.—Try your best, Jack. Good luck!"

Then he surprised his son by shaking hands with him.

CHAPTER XX

A SURPRISE PARTY

LATE one afternoon Ruth was drudging away over her drawing board, as usual, heedless of Mrs. Franklin's admonitions that she'd go stone blind if she kept on abusing her eyes that way. It was about five weeks after she had made her great decision, and dismissed Jack Bowling. She was expecting Doctor Webster to come for dinner that evening, and wanted to finish her work before he arrived. She was very tired, and her eyes had begun to ache from the strain of a long day's sketching, but she kept at it until Mrs. Franklin, who was following out Doctor Webster's secret instructions by affectionately tyrannizing over her young mistress, took the pen out of her hand. Then Ruth cheerfully surrendered, saying that she had done a good day's work anyhow, and accepted Mrs. Franklin's suggestion of a cup of tea—"To clear the cobwebs

out of your pretty little head," said the housekeeper.

While Ruth was sipping her tea, the telephone bell rang, and Doctor Webster was on the wire. When Ruth heard his voice, she was afraid he intended to break the dinner engagement;—she was feeling a little forlorn and in need of companionship that evening, and had been counting on him to cheer her up. The doctor reassured her, however, that he was not only coming, but was also going to bring a friend with him. She asked rather timidly who the friend was, and rejoiced to hear that it was Judge White, who thought it was about time for him to make another call on her. Ruth welcomed the suggestion, and instructed the doctor that Judge White must come prepared to stay for dinner too.

Having overheard Ruth's part of this telephone conversation, Mrs. Franklin began to show signs of social panic, declaring that she must get out the company china and linen. Before she could start at this domestic duty, however, the door-bell rang a kind of syncopated tune.

"Perhaps that's the postman," Ruth exclaimed.

"I'm expecting a letter from one of my editors. Hurry, please."

Mrs. Franklin bustled out to answer, as she was bid, and in a moment popped her head back into the studio to say:

"It wasn't the postman, Miss Ruth, it was Miss—oh, I've forgotten her name."

Ruth turned toward the door and found Della Forbush standing on the threshold, dressed as if she had just come out of a band-box.

"Della!" Ruth murmured, as if she were frightened. She had been sure Della would never speak to her again, and even now she was not certain whether the unexpected visitor came in a friendly or a hostile mood.

Della immediately put these doubts to flight. She held out her arms to Ruth and said warmly:

"Well, aren't you going to kiss me?"

Ruth hesitated for a second, and joyously threw herself into the waiting embrace.

"With all my heart!" she exclaimed, and ac-

cepted Della's invitation with an enthusiasm that was heartily seconded.

"Now then," said Della, after the exchanging of kisses had subsided, holding her off at arm's length, "let's have a look at you." Then, after a brief appraisal: "You're looking splendid."

"Really? I feel years older."

"Oh, well," Della answered cheerily, "time is bound to make a difference in all of us,—except Lillian Russell."

"I thought you had deserted me," Ruth remarked. "I haven't seen you for over a month. Where in the world have you been?"

"Deserted you? Never! Been? All over the map. In a touring car through New England,—mountains, sea-side, and all that sort of thing. I've been just wild to see you, and tell you all that's happened. May I stay a little while?"

"Yes, I want you to stay for dinner if you can."

Ruth served Della some tea, and they established themselves on a comfortable gossiping basis. Finally,

after some small talk, Della asked with a significant look which said she knew the whole story:

"Are you happy?"

"Why, yes, I suppose so," Ruth answered, wincing a little. "I have faith that everything will be all right."

"Ruth, are you going to marry Doctor Webster?"

This blunt question took away Ruth's breath. She was silent for a while, and then said sadly:

"Must I talk about that?"

"Yes, you must. Silence makes a lot of unhappiness, and I'm going to have it out with you."

"Of course you know everything—about Jack and me?"

"Yes, I know all about that. I know you made a great mistake,—that Jack should have married you, and didn't, and I've heard that he practically ran away."

"Not exactly," Ruth interrupted.

"I condemned you for that mistake, at first," Della ran on, "but some one opened my eyes, and made me think about such things with sympathy

and forgiveness. You can guess who it was did that."

"Was it—was it Ralph?"

"Of course.—Well, why don't you answer? I'm all in the dark, Ruth. How is it going to end?"

Ruth was silent for a while, and then said:

"I'm not worthy of Ralph; I've told him so."

Della looked into her eyes earnestly, slipped an arm around her waist, and asked quietly:

"Are you sure that in your heart there isn't a lurking memory of—of Jack Bowling?"

Ruth turned away, and put her hands up to her eyes. Then, in a strained voice, she answered:

"I—I don't know."

A rush of sympathy caused Della to begin dabbing at her eyes with her handkerchief, and then, telling herself that this would never do, she changed the subject.

"Well, we won't talk about it any more," she said blithely. "The past is past. What about the present? You're very practical now, I see. Illustrat-

tions, posters, even ads! Ruth, you're getting commercial!"

"I have to be. Of course I'm working for money. I need it."

"You talk like a pauper," Della observed. "You have a little income, I remember."

"Just enough to live on,—but I've debts to pay off,—and other obligations coming."

"Debts? As for instance?"

"I'll tell you about them some time, when they're paid."

Mrs. Franklin interrupted them by appearing, rather contritely, with a letter in her hand. She explained that it had come in the morning; that she had taken it to the kitchen, and as usual, had promptly forgotten about it. Ruth saw in a glance that it was the letter she had been expecting, and opened it excitedly. Then she cried out in delight, "At last!" and triumphantly waved a slip of paper before Della's eyes. It was a check.

"Good news?" Della inquired.

"The best! See here! I submitted a design in a poster contest, and I've won the first prize!"

When Della observed that the check was for five hundred dollars, she was profuse in congratulations.

"That will make a tidy bit of pin money," she said.

Ruth went to her desk, took out a savings bank book, and tucked the check away carefully. Then she answered Della.

"Pin money? No. It will help pay my debts."

"Debts to whom?"

"To Judge White."

Della stared at her and declared she didn't believe it.

"He took up some notes of my father's," Ruth explained.

Della looked bewildered, and stammered:

"Oh—I remember—the judge said something about it—but I don't imagine he needs the money particularly."

"At any rate, he must be paid," Ruth said decisively. "You will stay for dinner, of course?"

Della wanted to know if she would be an inconvenience, and Ruth assured her there was room for four.

"Four! I didn't know you were giving a party?"

"The doctor is coming with Judge White."

"Judge White!" Della burst out with a laugh.

"Is *he* coming here for dinner?"

"I told Ralph to bring him."

"Ruth, haven't you heard the news? I believe you have, and are just pretending you haven't."

"I can't imagine what you mean," Ruth replied, giving Della a perplexed look.

"Well—I'm *married!*"

Della excitedly tore off a glove and held up a finger with a wedding ring on it, to substantiate her astonishing declaration. Ruth examined the evidence, and became equally excited.

"Married! To whom? When? Where?"

"When? A month ago. Where? In Newport. To whom?—You can't guess!"

"Surely not to Judge White?" Ruth asked, the judge having been the last man mentioned in the conversation.

"I won't tell you now. I want to surprise you. You see, I met a lot of nice fellows in Newport. I don't want to boast, but I had at least seven proposals. I finally sorted out one man out of the seven, who measured up to my ideal of what a husband should be—that is, as near as a mere man could—and got it over with as soon as possible.—Perhaps you are wondering why I was so surprised when you told me Judge White was coming here for dinner? Well, he arranged all the details for the wedding—got the license, and looked after all the pre-nuptial legal matters, my allowance, and so forth. When I told my parents I was going to get married right away, they set up a whole mountain range of objections, but the judge succeeded in convincing them that my choice was *Some Man!*—If you ever get married, Ruth, let the judge perform the ceremony."

"But to whom did he marry you?" Ruth asked in bewilderment.

"Ask the judge when he comes," retorted Della. Just then the door-bell rang.

"Here they are!" Della exclaimed.

Ruth said she would go see, and Della, bubbling with laughter, scampered out in the opposite direction. It was, indeed, the dinner guests,—the doctor and the judge, the latter looking strangely rejuvenated.

"Who do you think is here?" Ruth chattered, as she led them into the studio. "She ran into the dining room when she heard you coming. No one but Della! I think she was afraid to meet the judge. And she says she has been married!"

"Married? To whom?" the doctor wanted to know.

"She won't tell me. She said the judge arranged everything for her."

"That's right," Judge White admitted, as he gave Ruth an affectionate pat on the arm.

Doctor Webster went to the dining room door,

and sternly called for Della, who tripped in blithely.

"Hello, doctor," she said carelessly. Then she pretended to notice the judge for the first time, and said formally: "How do you do, Judge White?"

The latter bowed with old-school courtesy, and answered in his most stately manner:

"How do you do, Mrs.—Mrs.——"

"So you are married?" the doctor observed. "Why didn't you bring your husband with you?"

"Yes, why didn't you?" echoed the judge.

Della explained that she couldn't find him when she started out.

"Well, what's his name?" the doctor demanded.

"Ask the judge," Della remarked impertinently. "He married me."

"By a singular coincidence," that worthy said, as the doctor and Ruth appealed to him, "I'm married, too."

"You? To whom?" The question spluttered spontaneously from Ruth's lips before she had time to see the joke.

"Ask Della," parroted the judge. "She married me."

The result was amazement on the part of the doctor and Ruth, and great glee on the part of the judge and Della. Then there were congratulations and hand-shakes and kisses, all mixed up and miscellaneous. When this outburst of enthusiasm had ended, Ruth left her guests to go out into the kitchen; Mrs. Franklin's frantic efforts to prepare a special dinner were in need of supervision.

"I never saw Ruth so happy," Della remarked after she had gone.

"Your coming has done her a lot of good," said the doctor, with gratitude in his voice.

"She'd brighten up anybody, this girl of mine," the judge declared, pulling Della down on the settle beside him, and giving her a honeymoon hug.

CHAPTER XXI

QUIXOTISM AND COMMONSENSE

WHILE they were waiting for dinner to be served, another caller dropped in. Della, who answered the bell to help out Mrs. Franklin, who was beginning to be stampeded by all this unwonted social activity, stood at the threshold and greeted the newcomer irreverently:

"We're going to have a regular gathering of the clan! Here's another member. Come in, you poor boob!"

The person who answered to that description, without resenting it, was Freddie Donlin, now dressed in imitation of an English gentleman, wearing an almost invisible mustache, and affecting a slight British accent. His trip abroad had wrought wonders in Freddie, it seemed.

"How's art getting along?" he asked Ruth gaily. He looked around the studio knowingly, and ob-

served: "The junk's all gone. What's become of the masterpiece,—Jack's picture?"

"With the rest of the junk, in the garage," said Ruth.

"Well, I'm a committee of one," he announced, "to negotiate its purchase for the decoration of the historic walls of our gym."

"It's yours, Freddie, to do with as you please," Ruth answered, "that is,—if Della doesn't object."

Della shrugged her shoulders, and replied, "We wish it on you, Freddie."

He wanted to know "How much?" but Ruth promptly closed the topic by saying he could have the picture as a gift. Then, with a gesture as if she wanted to embrace every one present, Freddie included, she exclaimed:

"Oh, you've made me so happy, all of you!"

"What do you think of our surprise party?" Della gurgled happily.

"Judge White looks five years younger," Ruth observed merrily; "you, Della, are prettier than

ever, and Freddie's got his hair parted in the middle."

"Modern improvements all around," explained Freddie. "And, by the way, don't overlook my nifty little mustache. That's new stuff, too."

Freddie was invited to stay for dinner too, but he declined.

"I'd like to, but I just got off the boat, don't you know, and ought to go up to the gym, to tell the boys how it happened. They're going to have a blow-out there to-night, in honor of Jack Bowling. Say, you ought to have seen him in that Marathon! He ran them all off their feet, and——"

Ruth pretended not to hear him, and turned away to say a word to Mrs. Franklin, while the judge and Della advised Freddie in pantomime that he was talking too much. The young man caught the hint, remembered there was some mystery about Jack and Ruth that passed his comprehension, and promptly dropped the topic. To cover up his confusion, he turned to the doctor:

"Say, Doc, I have a little account to square with

you. Do you remember that prescription you gave me?"

"For sea-sickness?"

"Yes. Well, old top, it worked like a charm. I won my bet. How much do I owe you?"

"Nothing," the doctor answered with a smile. "It was a new formula. I was just trying it out."

"New formula! What do you say to a partnership arrangement? I'll put the thing on the market, and divide with you, fifty-fifty! See here, I've got a pocketful of testimonials."

He dug into his breast pocket and pulled out a package of letters.

"Read them. They're great! Here's one from a bloomin' duke whom I met coming back. Give them the once-over, Doc."

He thrust the letters into Doctor Webster's hand, and wanted to know when he would sign a contract. He was too enthusiastic to be rebuffed unceremoniously, so the doctor cheerfully suggested that they go into the library, where he could inspect the letters carefully. They withdrew for this fantastic

business conference, and the judge, who was much amused by Freddie, was about to follow them, when Ruth stopped him.

"This reminds me, I have a little business to attend to with you," she said.

She went to her desk, took up a check book and filled out one of the blanks. Then she endorsed the check for prize money in the poster contest.

Judge White watched her anxiously while she was writing, and he gave Della a look which was a call for help.

"Accept it, for Heaven's sake," Della whispered to him. "You can give it to the doctor afterward."

Ruth blotted the two checks and then tendered them to the judge.

"I want you to take these checks," she said.

"What's this? I don't understand!"

"It is the first payment on one of the notes you took up for my father."

The judge looked very unhappy.

"You want me to take this money from you, Ruth?" he mumbled.

"You must," she answered firmly.

"But—the doctor——" he began to stammer, when Della, who was standing behind him, poked him energetically in the ribs. "Oh, all right; thanks," he added, and pocketed the checks.

"I want to thank you for the loan and everything else," Ruth continued. "You were very kind and good and I'll pay back every dollar."

The judge hemmed and hawed his way out of the situation, and then succeeded in effecting a retreat into the library, to join the doctor and Freddie.

Ruth and Della started for the dining room, to see that Mrs. Franklin hadn't forgotten to put on the knives and forks, but the latter checked them with the information that some one wanted to see Miss Stanley, and was waiting in the vestibule.

"Do you know who it is?" Ruth asked.

Mrs. Franklin hesitated, and then said that she thought it was Mr. Bowling.

Ruth caught at Della's arm.

"I can't see him!" she whispered, as if she were frightened.

"Shall I tell him that?" Mrs. Franklin asked.

"Why don't you see him, dear?" Della urged.

"Mrs. Franklin, tell him to wait for a few minutes."

Mrs. Franklin glanced at Ruth, and then, receiving no countermand, went out to do as she was bid.

"It's no use, Della," sighed Ruth wearily.

"Listen, dear," Della said tenderly. "I only want to say one thing:—I love you, the judge loves you; and we've talked it all over. We can see only one way out of your trouble."

"I know,—marriage. I've gone over all that, and my mind is made up. I will not marry him."

"Ruth, you can't change these customs that are thousands of years old. Better talk it over with him."

Ruth refused once more, but she was weakening, and Della knew it. She asked again, coaxingly:

"May I send him in?"

Then Ruth nodded sadly, and answered:

"Yes, if you wish."

Della hurried toward the outer hall, and then Ruth, seeking to evade the interview, the thought of

which alarmed her, as long as possible, disappeared into the dining room.

Just then the doctor, Freddie and the judge came out of the library together. Freddie was boasting that he would have a string of drug-stores from the Bronx to the Battery inside of a year, as he picked up his hat and prepared to go. After a glance down the hall, he turned to the judge and said in a conspirator's whisper:

"Why, there's Jack Bowling in the hall-way!"

"Freddie," growled the judge, "go home!"

"I get you," that youth observed sapiently. "This way out!"

Whereupon he led himself away by the coat-lapel, as he had seen vaudeville comedians do when making a "comic exit," and was eliminated as a disturbing factor in the situation that was developing.

The doctor, of course, had not overheard the bit of conversation between Freddie and Judge White, and the latter carefully shut the door after the departing trainer, with a little gesture of warning to Della, down the hall, that the coast was not yet

clear. He wanted to prepare Doctor Webster for the imminent intrusion of Jack Bowling, and he was thinking hard and fast about the crisis which seemed to be at hand. As Della told him afterward, he acted like a diplomatic old dear in the emergency.

He opened up with the matter of the checks that Ruth had given him.

"Now that we're alone, I can get these off my conscience," he said as he produced the slips of paper.

"What are they?"

"Checks. Ruth gave them to me to apply on one of the notes."

"She's worrying about paying off that debt, I guess," mused the doctor.

"You can imagine how I felt when she handed them to me, with expressions of the gratitude due you," the judge remarked.

"You and your wife have done a big thing for her in coming here to-day," the doctor answered gratefully. "You've shown her you are still her friends."

"Let me endorse these checks to you," suggested the judge.

"No, not now.—She might discover."

"I think she ought to know that it was you, not I, who helped her and her mother out of their financial troubles."

The judge said this with decision, whipped out his fountain pen and endorsed the checks, making them payable to Doctor Webster. He left them on the desk, and the doctor picked them up reluctantly.

"Please don't tell her," he urged the judge. "She must never feel under financial obligations to me—not until I have the right to be her banker."

"What right do you mean?"

"The right of a husband," the doctor answered candidly.

The judge threw up his hands at this quixotic declaration.

"You intend to marry her?" he demanded.

"Certainly."

"Now? Under present conditions?"

"Yes. Why not?"

The judge, who was taken completely by surprise, could only gasp:

“Why, it’s—it’s immoral!”

“Immoral? I suppose it would be highly moral to stand aside and let her face the world alone?” the doctor asked ironically. “Doubtless you expect nothing more of me than that. I know it’s quite the conventional thing to do, under the circumstances,—but I shall do as I think best, and shall be making no sacrifice, either.”

“What about giving your name to another man’s offspring?”

“That is my right. I cannot imagine the world would feel a grievance on that account. How absurd these conventional ideas are! I’ll bet you’ve been attracted to children—played with them—danced them on your knee?”

The judge chuckled as he answered:

“Yes, I’ve hopes of spending my second childhood in a nursery!”

“But these children of other men,” the doctor continued, “haven’t you felt you could adopt them,

could care for them if they were orphaned, eh?"

The judge admitted as much.

"Well, then, what's the difference? I feel that I can adopt Ruth's when it's born, give it a name, love it—because it will be hers. Immoral? Why, I'm preventing a scandal. To be sure, there are many people who love scandal. It would be too bad to cheat them out of just one, wouldn't it?"

The judge, however, was not convinced.

"Ruth should marry Jack," he insisted. "That's the proper thing to do."

"The conventional thing, you mean. And it is exactly what I advised her to do. I sent for you to perform the ceremony. That was my greatest mistake. That convinced her I had ceased to love her."

"I'm sorry for you, doctor, but Jack is to be considered."

"Don't forget that Ruth is to be reckoned with, first of all," he answered. "You can't say to her as you would to a slave: 'Here's the man who ruined you. You must be handcuffed to him for life.' She will not listen to it."

"She will," Judge White maintained stoutly, "if she is convinced that he loves her—and *he does!*"

"I don't believe it!"

"And she must have loved him very much," the judge continued. "He has come back—I've talked with him—and he is determined to win her, to convince her of his love. Of course, she is too proud and stubborn to marry him just to save her good name, but when she realizes that he loves her and wants her for herself—well, you'll see what happens. So I insist that we give them a chance——"

"No, he shall not be permitted to see her!" the doctor asserted firmly. "He has almost wrecked her life and mine. She needs my care and devotion more than ever now. What can he do for her? He is incapable of giving devotion,—of sacrificing himself."

"Oh, listen to reason!" the judge pleaded.

"To reason, yes. But not to your conventional sophistry."

The doctor sat down grimly, and waited for logical conviction, with a manner which intimated that the judge was wasting his time.

"I insist she does love him," Judge White began slowly. "That her pride has been hurt by the boy's neglect of her while he was training."

"Oh yes," the doctor answered, "it was easy to see that his heart was wrapped up in his foot-race."

"He was nothing but a boy. You will find him a man now."

"Apparently he has won you over, judge."

"Yes, and my wife,—and his own father. Bowling senior has been taken into his confidence."

"And you," asked the doctor, scenting a conspiracy, "have undertaken to remove the obstacle, meaning——"

"Meaning *you*. Exactly!"

"I love her," the doctor said intensely. "Do you understand that? I want you to believe it. Do you?"

"Of course."

"Are you equally sure that the boy loves her?"

"Why, yes."

"Can you be certain that the boy is not acting in a spirit of heroics? You are a judge. Assemble

your facts, weigh the evidence,—and before you pronounce sentence that will blast the happiness of my life, be very sure you are giving happiness to Ruth. That's all I ask."

The judge was troubled with this responsibility. He hesitated, and then said:

"Perhaps I'm wrong, and yet——"

"You may be right," the doctor interrupted. "Look here, you say this boy is in earnest, that he's determined to win her, that he really loves her. Very well, then, I do not believe it,—but I shall find out."

"How?"

"I don't know just how, but I shall find a way to test his soul with the acid of bitterness and remorse, I think. If he stands the test, I'll step aside. If he fails, you must stand by me in my decision to marry Ruth."

"Very well, I agree," the judge answered. "And I might as well tell you that the boy is here now."

"Here?"

"Yes, he is waiting out in the hall with Della, for a chance to talk with Ruth."

Doctor Webster looked glum at this information, and then remarked:

"Why not bring him in now?"

"You'll play fair," the judge asked, innocently enough, but at the doctor's sharp, resentful glance he apologized: "Pardon me. I know you will.—How will you begin?"

"Ah, yes, how shall I begin?" the doctor echoed wearily. "And what is of more importance, how shall I end?"

"Of course you will not oppose his seeing her here?"

"No. He shall have his chance,—and he'll lose."

Judge White opened the door leading into the hallway, and beckoned to Della and Jack, who came in immediately. As he heard their foot-steps, Doctor Webster turned away, and stared out of the window. He felt an instinctive repugnance to Jack's presence, and was striving to master it. He was also assembling all his powers of mind and will in preparation for the test he had determined to make.

CHAPTER XXII

THE TEST OF LOVE

JACK BOWLING followed Della into the studio timidly, for he thought he would find Ruth there. Judge White called his attention to the presence of the doctor, and informed him, in a few words, that the two of them must talk it out.

"I've done all I can, my boy," he said kindly. "I hope you succeed. We'll leave you two together. Della and I will wait for you in the library."

He and Della walked out hand in hand, and when they had gone, Doctor Webster turned slowly, and scrutinized Jack coldly.

"Well, Mr. Bowling?" he remarked.

"Well?" Jack answered, with like hostility.

"You have returned sooner than I expected."

"I caught the first boat back."

"Urgent business, I suppose."

"Very urgent."

"Whatever it is, I hope you meet with the success you deserve."

Jack thanked him suspiciously.

"I hear you were very successful on the other side," the doctor continued. "You won the Marathon?"

"Yes, I won it."

"I congratulate you. I hope you are equally successful in the race of life."

"No, you don't!" Jack answered, sharply.

"Oh, yes."

Jack was beginning to lose his temper under the doctor's rather sinister cross-examination.

"You hope I'll fail," he continued, "and you stand here now ready to oppose me. Your mind is made up to prevent me from winning the one big desire of my life. You stand between Ruth and me."

"Yes, and I will always stand between her and evil!" the doctor answered cuttingly.

"You know the advantage your knowledge gives you," Jack said sullenly, feeling that he was no

match for this man of cold reason. "You know how she needs your services. I've done her a terrible wrong, but I've come back to make good."

"Make good—you?"

"Yes. Why not?"

"You had your chance. Now it's too late. She will not listen to you."

"Perhaps,—but I shall do my best."

"Or your worst!"

"Are you going to let me see her?" Jack demanded.

"Yes."

"Alone?"

"Yes, if she requests it."

"Well, then, call her. Let's have it over with."

Doctor Webster started toward the dining room, and then paused, with the after-thought:

"She may refuse to come in if she knows you are still here. Better step up into the window, out of sight."

The suggestion stung Jack's pride, but he appre-

ciated its wisdom and obeyed. Then the doctor knocked on the door, and called to Ruth.

She came in timidly, asking:

"Has he gone?"

The doctor shook his head, and pointed to Jack. She turned in fright, and started away, but he halted her. Then Jack came out of the window-nook, and approached her.

"Ruth, please don't go," he begged. "I know I deserve to be punished, but you don't know how I have suffered."

"Have you?" she asked coldly. "I'm sorry. I don't wish to see you suffer, so you'd better go."

"Does the fact that I'm here mean nothing to you?" he urged. "The fact that I came back as soon as I could?"

"It means more humiliation."

"I have come back to tell you I love you," he said humbly. "You mean more to me than——"

"Love me?" she interrupted. "But you went away with your college chums to run a Marathon."

"I offered to stay," he reminded her.

"You offered to do your duty by me," she retorted. "Always your duty!"

"I'm not trying to excuse my conduct. I did want to go. I wanted to make good after training so long. I didn't realize the absolute need of haste.— I have a claim on you that you can't fail to recognize—the claim of fatherhood. You *must* marry me!"

Jack's confidence, however, was premature.

"Never, never!" Ruth broke out angrily. "Promise to love, honor and obey a man who has treated me as you have? I still hate the sense of duty that brings you back with another offer of marriage, just to ease your guilty conscience."

"Ruth, I'm asking you to forgive and forget," he urged. "If you'll only listen——"

"It's no use," she declared.

"I mean listen with your heart, dear, not just with your ears. Can't you realize that my love for you is the biggest thing in my life? That you are to be the mother of our baby? Are you going to deny me the right to claim my own flesh and blood?"

"Don't torture me!" she exclaimed, with a sob.

"If you'll only look at it in the right light we'll still be happy," he said. "For we did love then!"

"If you had cared, you never would have neglected me! You never would have gone away!"

"Oh, you don't know how much I cared!" he exclaimed. "And remember,—I didn't go of my own free will—the boys carried me onto the boat by main force. Why, ever since I left you, your grief-stricken face has haunted me. When I walked the ship's deck, you were by my side. When I ran the Marathon, it seemed that I was running to catch up with you! I forgot the prize that was at stake;—I forgot that the greatest runners in the world were entered against me. I only knew I must overtake you. You were the only prize worth winning. I ran past the goal without knowing it. The fellows brought me back and told me I had won, but in my heart I knew the race I was running was not over. That's what I've come back to tell you. A voice has been crying in my ear, 'Go back, go back,—in the

race for happiness you must run fair!" And I've come back to you, Ruth, to start all over again."

His lips were trembling as he spoke, and his eyes were flushed with tears. His voice had the true, fine ring of sincerity, but she would not let herself be persuaded. Automatically, as if she were repeating a lesson she had schooled herself to say, she replied:

"I feel no response to you in my heart. I'm glad you have resolved to make a fresh start, and I hope you will always run fair, and win too,—but I cannot be your wife."

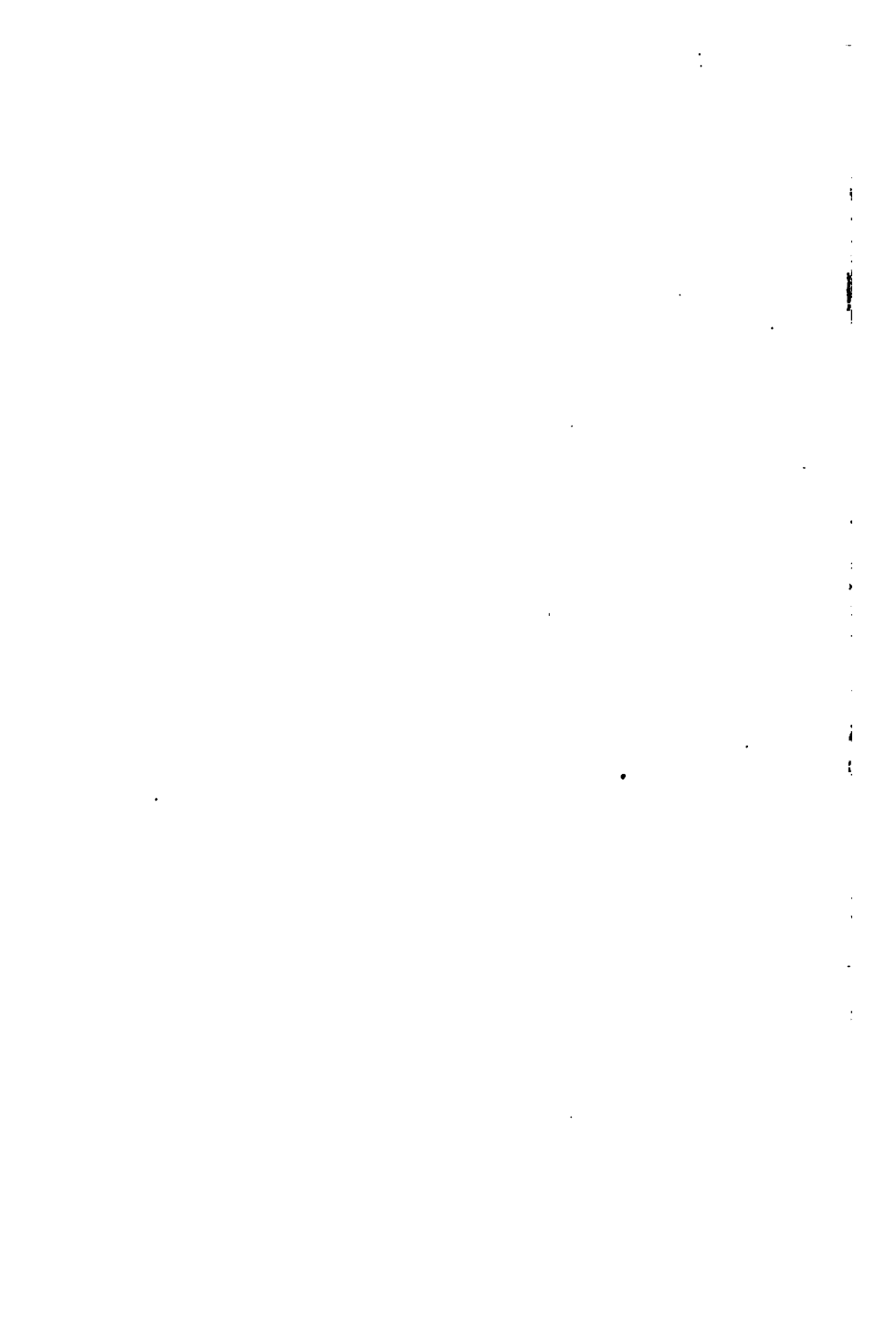
She started away as if to close the interview, and then he dropped into a chair by the desk and hid his face in his hands, ashamed to let them see that he was weeping. His last hope had gone.

The doctor stopped Ruth with a gesture. He, too, had something to say to her.

"Ruth, you cannot stand alone now," he said firmly. "From now on custom demands that a man shall stand by your side. I don't urge you to be any man's wife—in the full meaning of the word—but



"YOU—YOU LOVE ME STILL?"



I offer you that which I can not give to any other woman on earth,—the protection of my name.”

She looked at him, blank with astonishment.

“You—you would do that?” she asked weakly.

“Yes.”

“But—why?”

“Why? There is only one reason—I love you,” he answered quietly.

Overcome with this proof of a love that could forgive so completely, she could say nothing but repeat his words, with a kind of awe and reverence: “You—love me still?”

In one last desperate appeal, Jack rushed to her, threw himself on his knees before her, and seized her hand, crying:

“Ruth, look at me! Can’t you see, can’t you believe I love you? Can’t you realize it is not duty I’m talking about now? Can’t you? Can’t you?”

She looked at one, then at the other, and her face became radiant with a great joy.

“You do love me!” she exclaimed. “Both of you,—just for myself! It’s—it’s like a miracle! I shall never forget the honor you have both done

me, but"—she glanced from one to the other helplessly—"but I can't choose between you now—not now!"

She broke away and stumbled to a chair into which she sank, overcome with emotion. She had believed herself disgraced; she had thought that, in the man's code, she had lost the power to command the chivalry of full devotion, and yet here were the two men that knew all of her story, almost literally throwing themselves at her feet.

Taking this to be the final rebuff, Jack said dully, after a pause, as if to himself:

"What shall I do?"

"Leave her to me," the doctor answered him.

Jack refused and again proclaimed his love.

"You only desire her," the doctor sneered. "You want to be able to say, 'I ruined her, but I made good.' Isn't that it?"

Jack protested bitterly.

"Oh, I can't discuss the right or wrong of it with you! I only know that we loved,—that we were drawn together by some great power. You

may call it a mistake, a sin, if you will—I don't care and I don't attempt to justify myself—I only know that marriage will make it as near right as is humanly possible! I want to make her my wife! I love her, I love her, I tell you!"

"Again I say you only desire her," proclaimed the doctor cruelly. His manner was harsh and sinister. He seemed to be showing a new phase of his character, which Ruth did not understand. She listened in amazement as the doctor, heedless of Jack's fierce commands to stop, ran on:

"Your first impulse was to run away from the responsibility of your crime. Then your conscience hurt you. You talked with Judge White and your father. They made you feel ashamed, and you saw that the only way to retain their self-respect, and your own, was to marry the girl. You realized, also, that it wouldn't sound well to hear your own flesh and blood referred to later as a——"

Jack checked the horrible word on the doctor's lips with a furious oath and the threat of a blow.

"You've said enough," he raged.

"Not quite," retorted the implacable doctor. "There is just one thing more you must know. You have been brought to your present frame of mind by the thought that you would be the father of an illegitimate child. Isn't that so?"

"No!"

"Suppose you were to discover," insinuated the doctor, "that there was to be no child?"

"You mean you've——"

"If it were so," the doctor interrupted, "you would be under no obligation to marry her. She would be free. No one but ourselves would know. We could bind ourselves to secrecy, and you would escape a very unpleasant predicament."

Jack listened to Doctor Webster's hints with growing horror. Then their significance filled him with a great desolation.

"So that's what you've done!" he groaned.

"Isn't that what you wanted me to do?"

"No! I didn't! I didn't!"

Jack faced the doctor with disgust and hatred in his eyes. He was almost in the mood to murder.

"Well," he said grimly, opening and closing his hands, as if about to fly at the doctor's throat, "I've got you now! You'll do what I say,—you'll step aside,—or I'll prosecute you for criminal practice! You'll let me marry Ruth, or, by God, I'll——"

He was poised for a spring at his enemy, but suddenly Ruth slipped between them.

"It isn't true, Jack, it isn't true!" she cried frantically. "Oh, I never dreamed you would care for me this way! I don't know why Ralph should lie to you!"

She turned upon the doctor contemptuously.

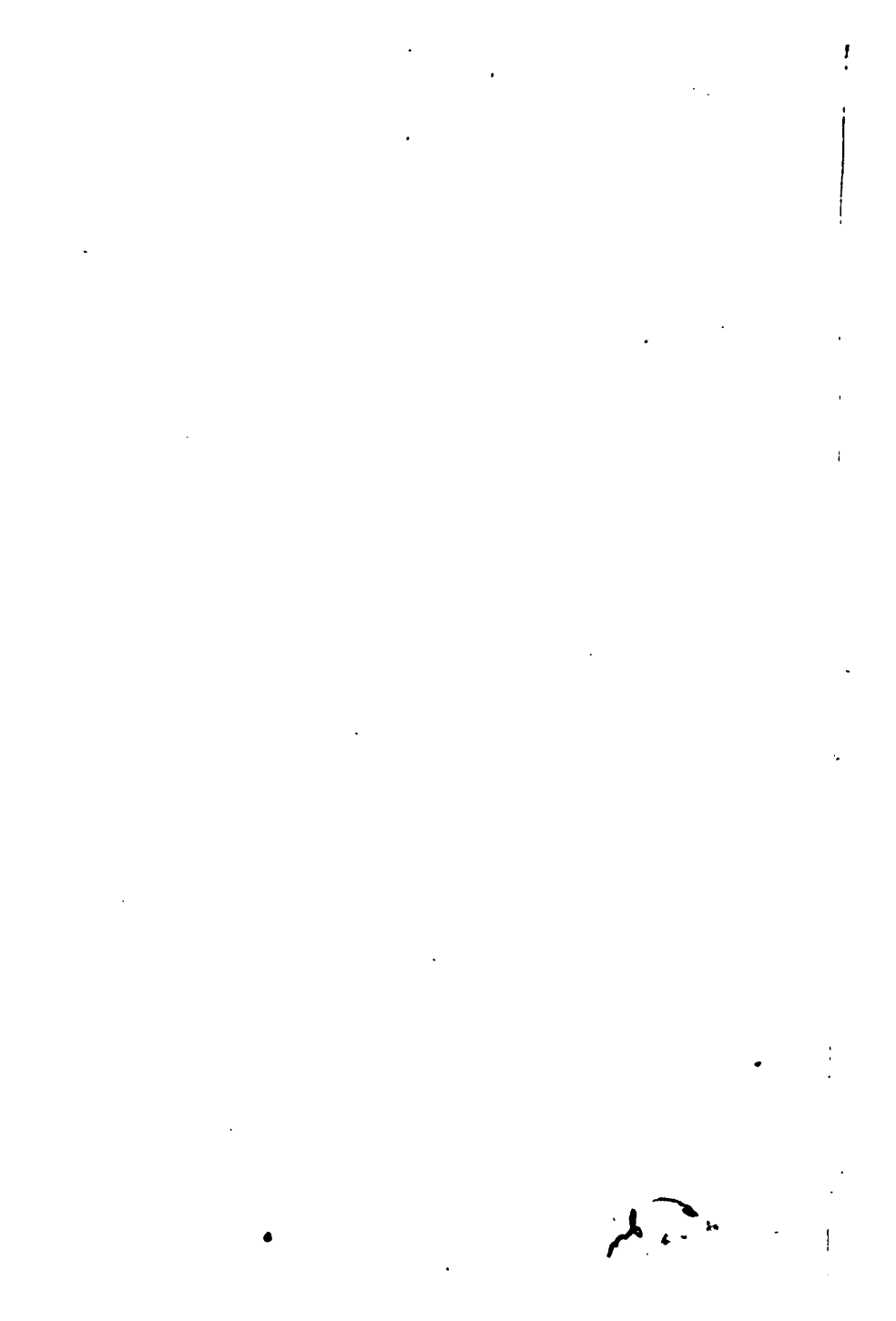
"Why did you say such things? How could you be so base, so ignoble?"

But as the doctor stood there quietly, smiling inscrutably at her, a queer twisted smile of pain and pride, she began to understand.

"I see," she whispered, and her arms went out toward him. "You did it to bring us together? You did it for me!"

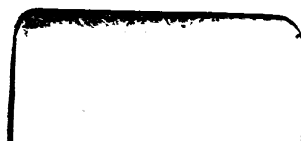
She became silent at the wonder of it all.

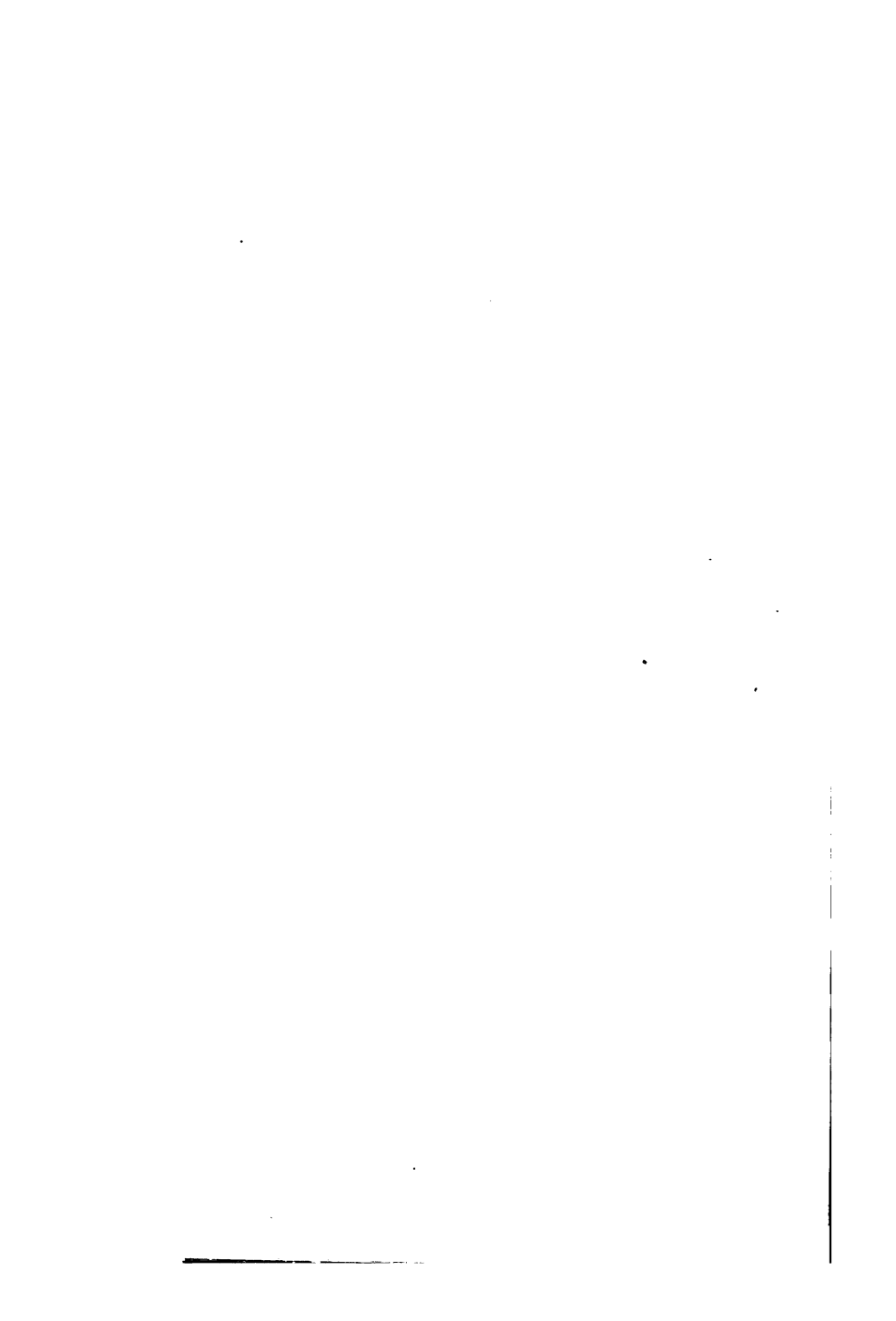
"Yes, for you," the doctor said softly. "To show you which way to go. It was the test."





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